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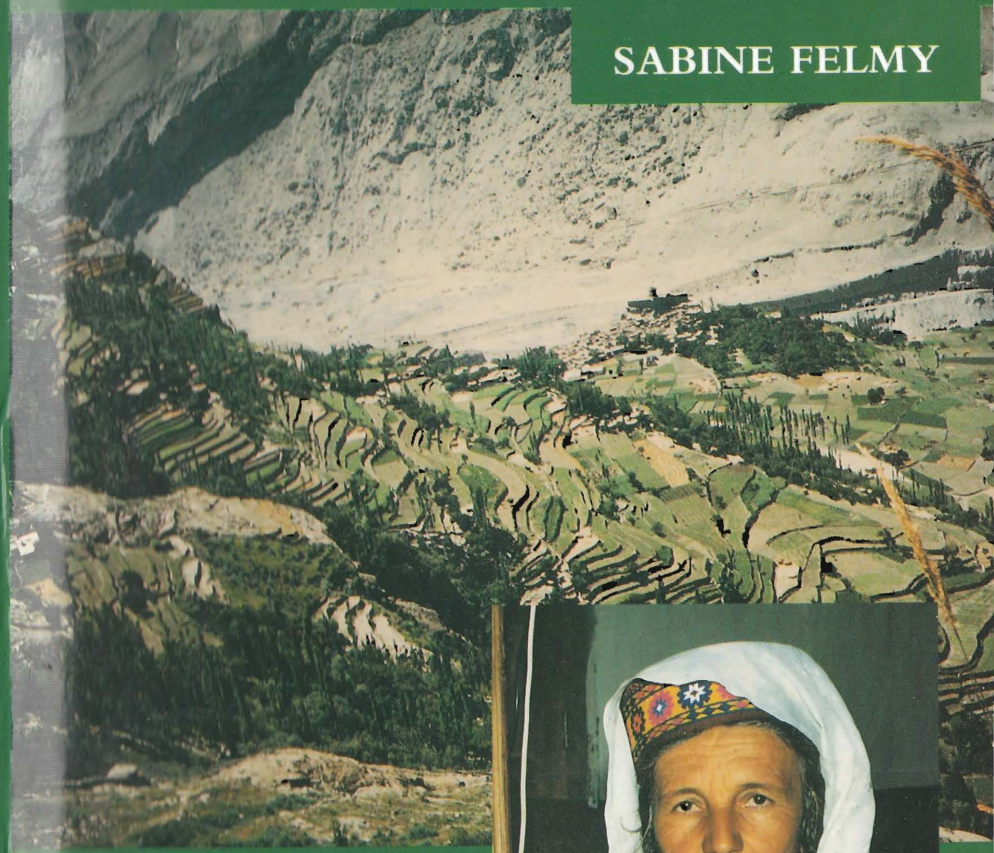
SABINE FELMY



A Personal Account of the Wakhi Culture in Hunza

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Sabine Felmy

The Wakhi, an ethnic group originating from Afghanistan, live in four neighbouring countries: Afghan Wakhan, Tajikistan, Xinjiang (China), and northern Pakistan. These remote mountain regions and crossroads of culture have been of interest to travellers and ethnographers since Marco Polo first wrote about them.

Sabine Felmy came to Pakistan in 1977, and lived among the Wakhi for several years, studying their history and oral traditions. In *The Voice of the Nightingale,* she presents an account in which local people express their views on daily matters and practices. Woven around a wider framework of archival research, historic travelogues and ethnographic literature, these narrations form the first comprehensive summation of this unique culture.

The voice of the nightingale refers to the famous (*bulbulik*) triplets sung by Wakhi women who spend the summers on the high pastures.

Sabine Felmy was born in Stuttgart, Germany in 1954. She obtained her Master of Arts degrees in English Literature and Education, from Albert-Ludwigs University, Freiburg. Interested in mountain cultures and oral traditions, she has travelled extensively through South and South East Asia, Australia, New Zealand and China. She has also carried out archival studies in London, and is frequently published in the German press and International scientific journals.

At present Ms Felmy is involved in management training and human resource development courses, and lectures at academic institutions from time to time.

She lives with her husband, Hermann Kreutzmann, in Berlin, Germany.

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Students in school uniform in a remote village in the Yarkhun Valley

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CONTENTS

	page
List of Illustrations	vii
Preface	ix
1. Origin and Migration	1
2. Rules and Regulations	16
3. Imaginations and Perceptions	31
4. Village Calendar and Celebrations	45
5. Public Life and Prospects	72
6. Wakhi Poetry	86
Glossary	97
Further Readings	103

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Students in school uniform in a remote village in the Yarkhun Valley — *Frontispiece*
Distribution of Wakhi settlements in High Asia — *page xii*
The traditional Wakhi house — *page 29*

Between pages 68–9

Preparation of food at the central fireplace
Evening at home
Apricots are dried on willow trays exposed to the sun on the roof of the house
Proud father and son
A respectable village elder
Children of a joint family
Ladies of the Women's *Tanzeem*
Chenir ceremony in honour of the barley harvesting season
Festive dress for *Salgirah*
Diamond Jubilee band performing on *Salgirah*
Wakhi village elders
Famous singer
Grandmother and grandchild
Father and daughter in traditional headgear
Water-mill at Ghujal
Preparation of bread
Momin's wife preparing tea
An old woman in Baroghil
Wakhi in Darkot (Yasin Valley)
Ganjuk, Momin's brother
Wakhi family in Darkot (Yasin Valley)
Momin in home-made coat, boots, socks, and hat

Between pages 68–9
Mr Shafi in his post-runner's uniform
Schoolboy
Musafir, the traveller from Wakhan
Pasu ladies crossing a bridge over the Hunza River
Rope being made of yak and goat hair
Hut in Vedinkot (Upper Yarkhun Valley)
Patumdas, lady shepherds
At a butter churn in Mulung Kir
Boiber: summer settlement where sheep and goats are pastured
To Mulung Kir
Potato planting—work for young and old
'Modern Times': threshing by machine
Terraced fields in the Hunza valley
Local porters accompanying a mountaineering expedition on Pasu Glacier
Oxen being taken to summer pasture
Bibi Khand, Shaman of Kamaris
Bibi Khand's husband
Bone-setting 'machine'...
...and patient
Ibadat Shah, teacher of teachers
Students proudly presenting their results
Open-air school, Kamaris
Gulmit centre
Polo tournament at the Shandur Pass
Dom musicians playing the *tutek* and *daamal*
Mud is collected for the construction of a new house
Intricate doorway constructed of mud and wood
Girls Academy, Karimabad
Batura Glacier
On top of the Khunjerab Pass, where the borders of Pakistan and China meet
Baltit Fort, home to the Rulers of Hunza

PREFACE

Prior to writing this book I had visited Pakistan several times. As a university student, my curiosity about the culture and geography of this country led to my first journey in 1977. Since then my affinity towards Pakistan, and especially the Northern Areas, developed over more than a dozen visits. After completing my MA, I felt Asia was beckoning me again. Taking the mountain areas of the Himalayas, Karakoram, and Hindu Kush as a starting point, I covered large distances on foot. I visited Chitral and the Kalash valleys at a time when hardly any jeep road existed. From Mastuj the trek continued across the Shandur Pass, an extraordinary spot for pitching a tent next to the highest polo ground of the world. On the way to Gupis, I explored the side valleys before reaching Gilgit, the busy communication and trading centre of the north. Following the traditional route towards Central Asia I discovered Hunza, which became almost my second home.

At the end of my two-year-spell in Asia, while in Xinjiang, I tried to return to Hunza via the shortest possible route. At that time the Chinese authorities were not prepared to issue a permit for crossing the Khunjerab Pass. Thus I took the long detour via Shanghai, Hongkong, Bangkok, Rangoon, and Dhaka. Only three years later, the border between Pakistan and China opened for international travellers.

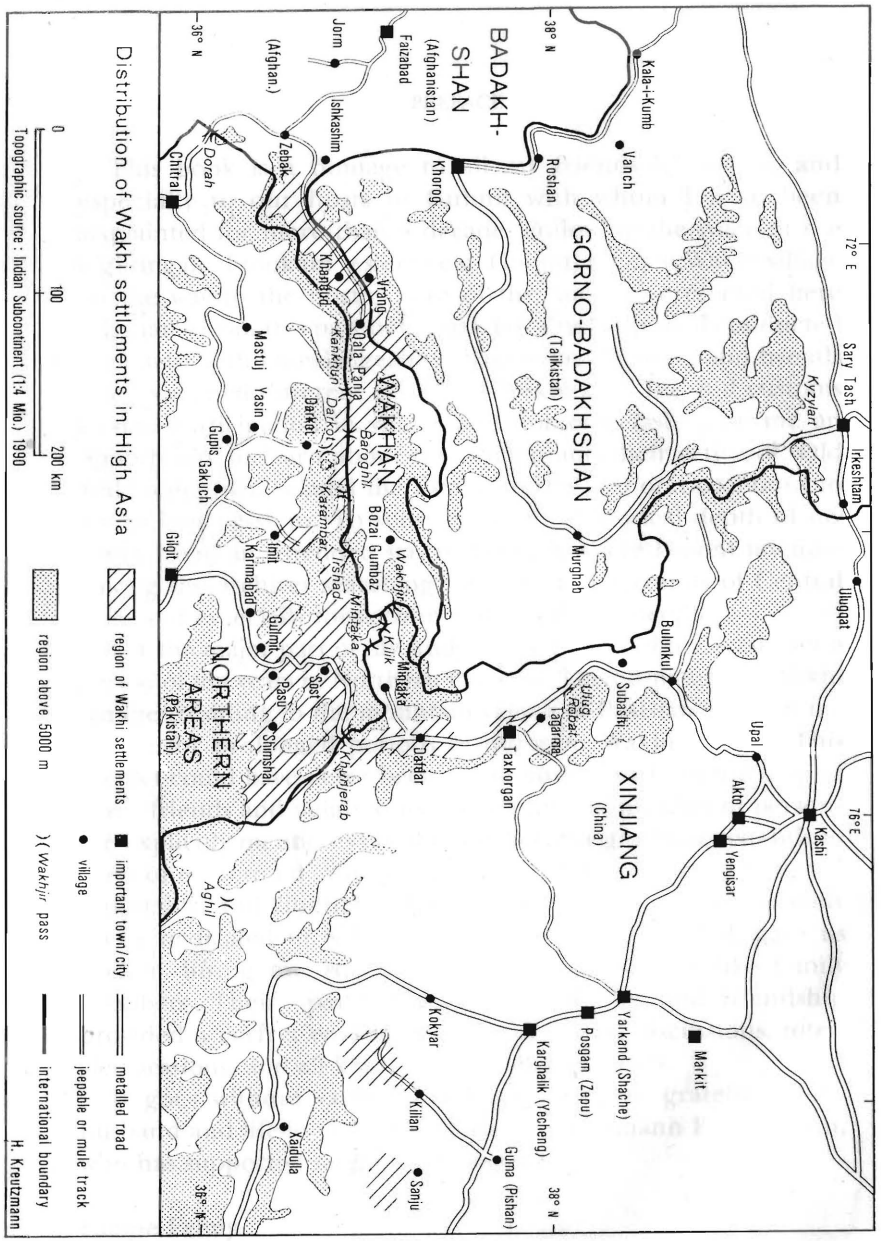
As a regular visitor combining work with a very enjoyable life among friends, I continued to follow my prime interest of learning about the mountain culture. As a result, in 1986, a book on folk-tales from Hunza was published. In this new endeavour the world-views of the Wakhi, who inhabit the highest parts of the remote mountain valleys of the Hindu-kush, Karakoram, and Pamir, are presented.

This book is a homage to all my friends in Hunza, and especially to our hosts in Gulmit with whom I have been acquainted for more than a decade. Following the voice of the nightingale, I took up residence in Gulmit, the first Wakhi village on the way to the north. Most of the material presented here originates from this part of Ghujal. For this purpose, I conducted interviews with knowledgeable villagers, neighbours, and friends who explained different aspects of Wakhi daily life and customs to me. Participation in village and domestic tasks gave me an opportunity to learn about the women and their activities. Old and young men related the local histories and oral traditions to me in long sessions. To substantiate the historical depth of my study, I had an extended stay in London where I spent my time among the archives searching for historical accounts of Central Asia, and especially for accounts of the Wakhi people.

For the major part of my study I have collected material over a period of ten years in Northern Pakistan. The hospitality of Wakhi families residing in the mountain valleys of Pakistan enabled me to live for prolonged periods in different Wakhi villages. This project could have never been accomplished without the help of many friends and neighbours. Only a limited number of persons are explicitly mentioned in the text but our gratitude extends to everyone—named and unnamed—for his or her support, hospitality, and kindness. This book on Wakhi culture and daily life is dedicated to N.S. who, alongwith her husband, gave us shelter during our stay in Gulmit and treated us like family members. Their openmindedness, hospitality, and friendship provided a perfect environment for extended discussions, interview sessions, and all kinds of other engagements.

It goes without saying that I am also very grateful to my husband and life-long travel companion, Hermann Kreutzmann, who has supported me in every respect.

Sabine Felmy



CHAPTER 1

ORIGIN AND MIGRATION

Living on the roof of the world

The roof of the world is home to many different ethno-linguistic groups. This high plateau is one of the oldest inhabited mountainous areas of the world. Some of the dominant grain crops of today originate from these irrigated oases of Inner Asia. The diversity of ethnic groups found here is the result of migration patterns and the persistence of these hardy settlers. Historical trade routes criss-crossed the roof of the world connecting the Mediterranean ports and the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent with the urban oases of Central Asia. All these factors contributed to the complicated ethnography and history of this area in which the Wakhi play a vital role.

Where do the Wakhi come from?

The Wakhan, a narrow valley in the north-east of Afghanistan, is the country of origin of all Wakhi people, giving this ethnic group and their language its name. Situated between high mountain ranges—Pamir in the north and Eastern Hindu Kush in the south—the Wakhan valley stretches over a distance of 200 kilometres with the river Oxus as its lifeline, a name well known through early travelogues. Qala-i-Panja, the former capital of the rulers of Wakhan, is perched on five hills above the Oxus at an altitude of 2800 metres. The last Mir of Wakhan, Ali Mardan Shah, was buried there after his death in 1926. The Afghan authorities later shifted the administration to Khandud, a little further east.

When the famous explorer, Marco Polo, travelled through Wakhan in the thirteenth century, he was not only impressed by

the abundance of wildlife and natural grazing grounds—Pamir means 'green highland'—but also by the ability of its people to cope with the hardships in one of the most remote areas of this world. Nineteenth-century travellers like John Wood who followed in his footsteps made similar observations. John Wood came in search of the source of the Oxus river with the sanction of the Supreme Government of India in the 1830s. 'The flocks of the Wakhani constitute his riches, or rather enable him to endure the ills to which his bleak high-living valley exposes him.' (Wood 1841: 373). Besides sheep and goats, cattle and yaks supply the Pamirian people with manure, skin, and fleece as well as the milk products which play an important role in their diet.

The Wakhi have always survived on a mixed mountain agriculture, making use of all ecological zones. The principal crops are peas, beans, barley, and a little wheat, pulses being used as bread cereals and fodder. The harsh climate, however, is unfavourable to agriculture, and the vegetation period is often limited to a short span of three or four months.

The harsh mountainous environment of the Pamir, Hindu Kush and Karakoram is host to numerous small ethnolinguistic groups. Such diversity is seldom found elsewhere in the world; hence the roof of the world has been classified by Professor Jettmar as an 'ethnographical museum'.

The Wakhi identify themselves by their Eastern Iranian language which belongs to the Pamirian group. Often they are mixed up with their Tajik neighbours who speak Tajik, which, like Dari, is a Persian dialect spoken in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. The Wakhi are all Muslim and belong to the Shiite Ismailiya branch, sometimes also called the Maulai sect. They regard His Highness the Aga Khan as their spiritual leader and have traditionally paid tithes to his local representatives, the *pirs*. Persian is their literature and cult language, and at the same time is used as a *lingua franca* among the different ethnic groups.

The Wakhan was ruled by its own kings *(mir)* until 1883. This small principality on the roof of the world has constantly faced outside pressure. The Wakhi population has suffered deportation, slavery, and religious and political persecution over the centuries. Regional conflicts in Badakhshan and Central Asia forced the Wakhi to leave their homes and emigrate to Xinjiang (China) and northern Pakistan even before Wakhan lost its autonomy in

1883. Captain Barrow, the author of the first *Gazetteer of the Afghan Provinces of the Upper Oxus,* reports that before Wakhan was taken over by the Afghan government, 'The population in 1883 was about 6,000, i.e., 300 houses. A house in Wakhan means a family hamlet, and many consist of twelve to fifty people; but twenty may be taken as a fair average.' (Barrow 1888: 124). Ali Mardan Shah, the ruler at that time, fearing for his life, fled with half of the Wakhi population across the border into Yasin and Ishkoman, where the Mehtar of Chitral, Aman-ul-Mulk, granted him exile.

The Wakhan corridor of today was created during the 'Great Game' of Russia and British India. This buffer zone under Afghan control resulted from their negotiations in 1895: the Oxus river emerged as a natural landmark and the new border between Russia and Afghanistan. Thus, the northern part of Wakhan came under Bukharan supremacy. To escape oppression in the form of high taxes and forced labour, as well as out of fear of conscription and starvation, a large number of migrants left the Wakhan in the period between 1883 and 1919. Groups of migrants crossed the passes into the neighbouring valleys and took refuge in their inhospitable upper reaches. It was during this period that most of the present Wakhi settlements were established in uninhabited and remote valleys. Communication between relatives were sustained across the high mountain passes.

The Russian and Chinese Revolutions led to stricter border control, and international agreements made cross-border exchange more difficult. The official diaries kept by the British Political Agents in Gilgit and Kashgar give a contemporary record of the difficulties trespassers faced when ignoring the newly established boundaries. Thus the Political Agent, Crichton, notes in 1940, under the heading of 'Afghan Wakhan',

> Two Afghan Wakhis arrived in Chupursan (Hunza) during the month and on being turned back from there, crossed the Chilinji pass into Ishkoman where they were arrested. They said they had fled from Wakhan because the Afghan authorities were conscripting Wakhis for service in the Army. They have now been sent back to their homes from Ishkoman.
>
> (Gilgit Agency Political Diary 1940: 134)

All the Wakhi I have met have been living outside of Wakhan, separated by colonial borders. Today the Wakhi are found in four different neighbouring countries: about 9,500 Wakhi live in

Afghan Wakhan, 12,000 in Tajikistan (Commonwealth of Independent States), 3,500 in Xinjiang (China), and 10,500 in the northern areas of Pakistan.

In Tajikistan, the Pamirian people were granted an autonomous region called Gorno Badakhshan in 1925. Later on they were organized in *kolkhozs*. Some of the mountain people, including the Wakhi, have been resettled in the cotton-growing plains of Uzbekistan, in disregard of the socio-cultural and climatic problems they faced in the lowlands. G.V.B Gillan, the Political Agent in Gilgit, records their uprooting under the heading 'Russian Pamirs' in his official diary in 1933:

> Reports are current from Wakhan that the Soviet authorities have ordered all cultivators to hand over their grain, keeping only a half pound per head per diem for their own subsistence: that they have abolished the Muhammadan law relating to marriage and that they are endeavouring to send numbers of Kirghiz and Wakhis in the plains of Tashkent for their speedier assimilation of Bolshevik culture.
>
> (Gilgit Agency Political Diary 1933: 325)

Recent political changes have favoured a revival of the autonomy movement of the Muslim population of Tajikistan. Since events in Tajikistan led to the separation of the Wakhi enclaves, each enclave developed independently of the other. Thus different living conditions prevail in each of the Wakhi habitats.

In Chinese Xinjiang, the Wakhi settled in the heart of the nomadic pasture areas of the Taghdumbash Pamir, where they established their settlements on the upper limit of cultivation. After Mao Zedong's revolution, people's communes were established, and these still comprise the dominant settlement features in rural China. This applies as well to the Wakhi villages which I visited on the Pamir plateau, at the highest altitudes for permanent settlements, in the vicinity of Tashkurgan, the centre of the Tajik Autonomous County. The villages are located along the Pak-China Friendship Highway which follows the traditional trade-route between Gilgit and Kashgar, known as the Silk Route. The Wakhi village of Dafdar formed one stage on the mail track to the British Consulate in Kashgar, when the subcontinent was part of the British empire. The border regions offer excellent grazing grounds which were utilized from the Hunza and Dafdar side. Nowadays these summer settlements on the roof of the

world are inhabited by the Kirghiz, the Wakhi, and the Sarikoli, where they breed livestock and process milk products. A common sight is small caravans of two-humped Bactrian camels moving the yurts (felt tents) from pasture to pasture. Their flocks are composed of the highly valued fat-tailed sheep *(dumba)* and the Pamirian yak which is able to graze on the highest and remotest pastures. Here the Wakhi have adopted the convenient and mobile yurt from their Kirghiz neighbours, but have adjusted this nomadic equipment to their own lifestyle. All inhabitants of the Taghdumbash Pamir alike offer their products in the bazaars of Kashgar. This oasis and market-place has developed into the most important business centre of southern Xinjiang. To their Chinese and Uigur counterparts the Wakhi are Tajiks, a synonym for Eastern Iranian-speaking people and Ismaili Muslims in China.

It has not been possible to visit the Afghan Wakhan valley in recent years, since the warlike state in Afghanistan is yet to end. The presence of Soviet troops in Wakhan, led to rumours that the whole area had been annexed, although this was never confirmed, and until today the southern part of Wakhan forms an integral part of Afghanistan. When we visited Baroghil on the Afghan border in 1991, we were told that the Mujahiddin were now in control of Wakhan. Since the collapse of Najibullah's regime in April 1992 there have been only sporadic reports on the fate of the Wakhi people in Afghanistan. The change of government in Kabul has, however, made it possible for Wakhi traders to offer livestock products in the bazaars of Chitral again.

The Wakhi found abode in the formerly independent principalities of Chitral and Hunza, which lost their autonomy in 1969 and 1974 respectively and have since been integrated into the administration by the Government of Pakistan. Wakhi habitats within Pakistan are scattered in different valleys of the north. To reach the Wakhi population in the Upper Yarkhun valley of Chitral involves a long trek through difficult terrain, as Baroghil lies close to the Afghan border and is under tight security measures and control. It took a long time and a lot of patience to get the necessary permits for travel to this remote area. The Upper Yarkhun valley is out of bounds not only because of bureaucratic impediments, but also due to its isolation and lack of infrastructural assets: roads, electricity, shops, schools,

and medical posts are non-existent. We trekked on foot across the 4,600 metre high Darkot Pass, and reached an area which came close to how we had imagined Wakhan to be from numerous old travelogues. Remoteness has enabled the Wakhi to preserve their traditional way of life. Self-reliance and subsistence farming are essential features of Baroghil. Due to the difficulty of access the Upper Yarkhun saw permanent settlements only three generations ago. Before that, shepherds who used to come there in the summers were the only visitors.

I will never forget Momin, who gave us shelter in Kishmanja. When we entered his house he sat next to the central fireplace repairing his yak-skin boots. He was wearing the colourful woollen socks famous in the Pamirs, a home-made felt jacket, and a fleece hat. The families of Momin, and of his brother Ganjuk, are the only inhabitants of this hamlet, living permanently at an altitude of 3,280 metres, but for the occasional traveller they preserve a *mehman khana* (guesthouse), living up to the proverbial hospitality of the mountain people. At another stage, further up, unexpectedly bigger villages appear. They lie closer to the fertile pastures of Baroghil where the Wakhi spend the summers. In total more than 1000 Wakhi live in this remote spot, making a living basically from animal husbandry.

Across the Darkot Pass a few Wakhi families live in the Upper Yasin valley, which can be reached by a jeep road and has many more facilities, like schools, medical treatment, and shops. Here the Wakhi families are closely integrated into the Burushaski-speaking society, having married outside their ethnic group, and the children we met had difficulties conversing in Wakhi.

A larger community of Wakhi lives further east in neighbouring Ishkoman. Several villages in and above Imit are dominated by this group. They are also surrounded by a multicultural environment. In Imit alone one finds seven different ethnic groups, all speaking their own language. Migrants from Chitral and Yasin speak Khowar and Burushaski, the Dareli people belong to the group of Shina-speakers, while the Uigur refugees from Kashgar represent a Turkic group. Gujar nomads have also settled here, and Pathan traders from Bajaur have joined in the trading business. All of them communicate and trade with each other but otherwise live in separate neighbourhoods. The Wakhi migrants came to Yasin and Ishkoman at the end of the

nineteenth century as retainers of their deposed ruler, Mir Ali Mardan Shah. The Mehtar of Chitral granted the upper valley to Mardan Shah as a *jagir* (fief) while he waited in exile for the right moment to reconquer his throne in Wakhan. He was, however, never to return to his home. In 1896, the British authorities appointed him Governor of Ishkoman. It was only after his death in 1926 that his body was buried in Qala-i-Panja. His followers cultivated the formerly barren land and founded a community of their own in the upper parts of the valley.

The largest group of Wakhi in Pakistan have settled in Ghujal, in the upper reaches of the Hunza valley. They migrated from Wakhan mainly at the beginning of the nineteenth century to escape deportation, slavery, and religious persecution. The Mir of Hunza allowed these refugees to settle in the northern part of his kingdom, where Kirghiz nomads with their flocks were utilizing the pastures of the Karakoram only seasonally. Living under the protection of Hunza, the Wakhi had to pay tribute to the Mir whose seat was in Baltit, Central Hunza, where the population speaks Burusho or Burushaski, a language which cannot be connected to any language family. Until Hunza lost its independence in 1974, the rulers of Hunza paid regular visits to Ghujal. In Gulmit, the first Wakhi settlement of the Hunza valley, there is a small palace for the royal family, nowadays left vacant.

Past events are quickly forgotten in a changing society. Musafir Khan remembers well the circumstances of his journey to Hunza. He narrated the story of his departure from Afghan Wakhan, which took place fairly recently compared to the mainstream of migrants to Ghujal, but which turned out to be a rather tragic experience. Like Ali Mardan Shah, he never returned from a journey across the passes to his native village in Wakhan.

Journey without return

Musafir Khan, called Da-uti, from Sarhad-i-Wakhan, is the only living inhabitant of Gulmit who was born in Wakhan. He is about seventy-five years old. According to his own account, he was ten years old when the former ruler of Wakhan, Mir Ali Mardan Shah, died in 1926.

At the age of fifteen, Musafir Khan was sent from his native village in Wakhan for trading purposes to Gilgit. Ashaqo, a Hunzukuts merchant from Gilgit, had ordered a flock of sheep and goats. Together with two friends and neighbours, Musafir Khan took the animals across the Baroghil Pass into the Yarkhun valley, where they were supposed to meet Ashaqo. A representative of Ashaqo brought the message that he was waiting for them and their flock in Sukhtarabad, the first village at the head of the Ishkoman valley, where he had planned to settle the deal. When they reached Sukhtarabad, again, they only met a representative who told them to drive the flock to Imit, the principal Wakhi village of Ishkoman.

There the local *wazir* (governor), Sadon Shah, seized the first opportunity to arrest them as they had crossed the border into the Gilgit Agency without valid documents. In Imit they were kept in custody for a long time but Ashaqo never arrived. Instead, they were fed with hopes of getting the money sent from Gilgit. When Wazir Sadon Shah left for the annual meeting of dignitaries *(darbar)* and polo tournament in Gilgit the cattle-dealers were allowed to accompany him. Immediately after their arrival in Gilgit they were put under arrest again for not being able to produce valid documents. Musafir remembers that their business partners tried to get them released and their property restored. The three men who paid the bail were Mashruf, Rahbar Hassan, and a brother of Ashaqo. Afterwards, they had to report daily at the *tehsil* office, which is the sub-divisional administrative branch of a district. For two months nothing happened and the party stayed on in Gilgit.

A man called Khairullah suggested they contact the Intelligence Bureau to clarify the situation and seek residence permits. It turned out that the man from the Intelligence Bureau spoke Persian and promised to stand up for the three Wakhis. He arranged for them to meet the Political Agent to consult him about their problem. The Political Agent decided that Ashaqo should pay a sum of Rs 900 for the animals, which was then divided amongst the three drovers.

In the meantime, they learnt that news about their fate had reached home. Discussing their situation, they decided not to return home as they feared the atrocities of the Afghan authorities and accusations of illegal border trespassing and

smuggling. Consequently, a petition was filed and presented to the Political Agent for a residence permit. Finally, they were granted domicile within the Gilgit Agency. Musafir's two companions took their share of the business to Yasin and Ishkoman respectively and settled there, while he remained in the town of Gilgit.

In the beginning, Musafir Khan worked as a shoemaker, and for some time he made a living as a transport agent. Thus he once accompanied local traders as a mule drover to the Thui valley in Yasin where they were supposed to buy grain for the colonial administration. Here he managed to gather some wealth, at least by his standards, and was able to buy a horse and two donkeys, which were the foundation of his own forwarding trade. When his brother Khuran Shah arrived from Wakhan he joined in the business, and became his partner.

During President Ayub Khan's government in the 1950s, all transporters were conscripted to carry military goods to the Indian border areas. As Musafir Khan was ill and unable to make the journey he sent his brother on this mission. That was the last he saw of him and any of his relatives. There were rumours that Khuran Shah sold all the animals and afterwards retreated to Karachi to seek his fortune there. Musafir Khan remained in Gilgit and started again working as a shoemaker. For the last fifteen years he has been living in Gulmit, where he works as a farmhand with different families.

Since leaving his native place, Musafir Khan has never had a family nor a house of his own. Being always on the move he has been living up to his name—*musafir* means traveller. In his youth Sarhad-i-Wakhan was a village of about hundred houses. 'We didn't live isolated like here in Gulmit, but in bigger clans together, most of the time amongst brothers,' he told me. In Gulmit he has been provided with a room in the old part of the village and several families supply him with food and clothing. His unstable health worries his neighbours, who are concerned about him. When he was feeling well, we would often see him sitting in front of the shops chatting and watching village life. Gulmit has become a second home for him where he wants to spend his old age. But he still remembers all the villages in the Wakhan which we know only from maps.

Relations with rulers and neighbours

Wakhi settlers in Ghujal were integrated into Hunza State as an important economic and strategic asset. The thriving Wakhi community increased the wealth of Hunza and guaranteed its safety in the north. Their topographical knowledge, cross-boundary connections and stock-breeding abilities enhanced their internal relationships in Hunza. Manifold links were established between the Hunza rulers and Wakhi families. Many of the princes *(gushpur)* of the royal family were entrusted to the care of Wakhi wet-nurses and developed life-long bonds with their milk-families *(zarz)*. The grown-up foster-child could count on the support of his foster family in times of political crises, e.g., when it came to feuds over the succession to the throne. Often the foster-father was rewarded with an appointment to a respectable post. My neighbour, Panjshambi, related the story of Mir Silum Khan III, ruler from 1790 to 1825, who was reared in Gulmit by foster-parents and who felt a special regard for northern Hunza all his life.

Silum Khan was brought up for a short period by the family of Ashur and his wife Gulbahar, who was from Wakhan. Ashur belonged to the Budule clan *(kutor)* of Gulmit. He died early, leaving his wife and their only son Bhai Nasar, who was then still a little boy. Ashur's brother Ceik wanted to send Gulbahar back to Wakhan after her husband's death, but Arbab Noor Ali of the Charshambi *kutor* intervened. He succeeded in stopping her from being sent to Wakhan; but instead he advised her to go to Baltit, to the palace of Tham Khisrau Khan. The Mir's son Silum Khan was then living with his foster-family of the Shabikuts clan in Ganesh, and had become very ill and weak. Tham Khisrau Khan asked Gulbahar to look after his son. When she went to see him she immediately knew what was wrong: his whole body was covered with abscesses. She made a paste of cattle dung and put it on his wounds, literally covering his whole body with manure. The child was much better afterwards. The king rejoiced and asked Gulbahar, who had saved his child, to take care of Silum Khan in the future. She hesitated, being a poor rejected widow without any home of her own. Tham Khisrau Khan provided her with a house in Gulmit and ordered her brothers-in-law Ceik and Lul to serve her and work for her all their lives long. That is how

Silum Khan came to Gulmit. He developed a great love for this village and was buried in Gulmit in the year 1825. Another *tham* of Hunza, Mir Ghazan Khan, who ruled Hunza from 1939 to 1945, was also buried in Gulmit.

Every winter the royal household was transferred to Ghujal for the hunting season. At that time the mountains close to the Chinese border were full of snow leopard *(Felis uncia)*, Marco Polo sheep *(Ovis ammon poli)*, markhor *(Capra falconeri)*, ibex *(Capra ibex)*, as well as birds. Although not protected by a national park, wildlife was protected in that hunting was regulated by the Mir, who executed his control through the distribution of guns among the households. The royal family could also afford to keep Bactrian camels, like their Central Asian neighbours. These camels and yaks allowed for the regular transportation of valuable goods across high mountains in trade caravans.

Only a few trusted persons, like Zafarullah Beg from Gulmit and some from Chupursan and Misgar, went across the border to trade with Kirghiz nomads in the remote Pamir pastures. Like everything else in Hunza, the Mir controlled these movements and participated in their profits. Before 1974, a letter of recommendation written by the Mir of Hunza to the Political Agent in Gilgit was necessary in order to get a trade permit valid for a year. Later on a permit for this kind of business had to be granted by the deputy commissioner (DC) in Gilgit. A famous way-station *en route* after crossing the Irshad Pass was Bozai Gumbaz, which is known as a *ziarat* (burial-place and shrine). At this place about two centuries ago a Kirghiz chief of the name Bozai was defeated and killed by a Hunza force. The event is related as follows: Kirghiz nomads had been looting caravans and interrupting trade between Hunza and Wakhan. In revenge, a Hunza force raided the Kirghiz settlement, plundering 400 tents and expelling the men from their pastures. The captured women and children were sold into slavery. Afterwards, Hunza controlled this region and levied taxes from all graziers. Only in this century did Kirghiz nomads reoccupy the Little Pamir and start business relations with Hunza again.

The Hunzukuts traders that I met were heading for different settlements of scattered Kirghiz groups in the remote pastures of the Pamirs. Only excellent pathfinders could make their way with their precious and heavy loads to the Kirghiz yurts.

Zafarullah Beg, as one of the Mir's headmen *(tranpha)*, had the privilege of looking after his flocks in the Chupursan valley, contiguous to the Pamirs. This duty enabled him to establish a small business with his nomadic neighbours. Basically, the Kirghiz were in need of foodstuffs like flour and dried vegetables. In addition they asked trusted persons like Zafarullah Beg to provide them with valuable goods from Pakistan's bazaars such as tea, cigarettes, cotton clothes, leather goods (e.g., shoes), radios and cassette recorders, as well as binoculars. They traded these goods for yaks, sheep, goats and horses, butter, felt rugs *(namda)*, saddles and harness, which Zafarullah Beg took to Ghujal. He sold most of the goods between Chupursan and Gulmit. With the Afghan revolution in 1978, the political situation in the Pamirs became uncertain for the Kirghiz. Zafarullah Beg was received reluctantly and the climate of trade was badly affected. Later on, many Kirghiz fled to Pakistan, and all trade and barter relations with the Afghan Pamirs were given up. But for the Hunza entrepreneurs new lands have opened up, and the border with China has become permeable again. After nearly two decades trade caravans have started to cross the Taghdumbash Pamir again, on their way to the Central Asian trading oases. The traditional links between Gilgit and Kashgar follow historical patterns well known to the area.

Hunza had been connected with the Chinese rulers in Xinjiang since the middle of the eighteenth century through tributary relations. The Mirs of Hunza were granted the right to use pastures on the Taghdumbash Pamir, in Sarikol, and to cultivate fields in the Raskam valley as long as they paid their annual gold tribute to the Chinese authorities. In exchange for an equivalent of 75 grams of gold-dust, extracted by panning from the Hunza River, the Mir was presented with Chinese silk and cotton, tea bricks, and porcelain cups, of much higher value. He also had the right to levy annual taxes from the Kirghiz nomads who grazed their flocks on the Pamir pastures. Sick persons came from China to Hunza for medical treatment, and there was lively trade to and fro. In 1937, Mir Muhammad Nazim Khan was finally forced to give up all his pretensions to the grazing grounds in Chinese Turkestan, described by Major Kirkbride as 'the end of a very old chapter in local history'. The Chinese revolution in 1949 led to a total break in communications, which were not

restored for twenty years, until a co-operative effort was made in building a road across the 4,450 metre high Khunjerab Pass called the Karakoram Highway (KKH), or the Pak-China Friendship Highway.

Hunza has always been situated in a politically sensitive region. 'Reports of intended invasion of Hunza from Xinjiang were received from Kashgar, and a platoon of Gilgit Scouts was despatched to Misgar as a precautionary measure.' (Gilgit Agency Political Diary 1939: 175). Being close to the border area gave the population of Ghujal new income opportunities in addition to their traditional system of subsistence farming. They were engaged not only as soldiers, but also as couriers during colonial times to send messages to the British consulate in Kashgar (Xinjiang).

British India had transferred all the area west of the Indus to the Maharaja of Kashmir, to whom from 1870 Hunza paid a regular tribute in the form of gold-dust, horses, hounds, and fruit, in return for which they were compensated by small annual subsidies. British India sent John Biddulph as the first Political Agent to Gilgit in 1878. This representative of the Empire who was stationed permanently in the newly-established Gilgit Agency, and twenty-four colonial officers after him, were given the task of controlling the tribal belt in the north. The local chieftains were pacified in the famous 'Hunza Campaign' of 1891, and a form of indirect rule was initiated which remained in practice until the creation of Pakistan in 1947.

British India made use of the Hunza valley in order to keep contact with its northernmost consulate in Kashgar. A telegraph line from Srinagar, installed at the beginning of the twentieth century, ended in Misgar in Upper Hunza, from where mainly Wakhi runners brought messages to Xinjiang across the Karakoram passes. The crossing of the Kilik and Mintaka Passes on foot or horseback was, at that time a very dangerous undertaking, as an entry in the *Gilgit Diaries* shows: 'The Hunza runners taking up the Kashgar Consulate post were fired at near Dafdar by a party of Sarikulis: there were no casualties.' (Gilgit Agency Political Diary 1934: 10). Others were caught in snowstorms and badly frostbitten. Their experiences are reflected in numerous songs and poems, such as the lines heard in Dafdar, a Chinese Wakhi village, recalling the hardships of the post-runners in former times.

Naghdiv maz di pastor.
shuprem ghata da Jurghol.
ruchnerem ghate Siriqol.
Siriqoli lup diyor.
dushman angrez verspo avol.

In the night I am forced to move.
I reached Jurghol.
In the morning I arrived in Sariqol.
Sariqol is a big village.
The British enemy is responsible for all my troubles.

There were fourteen different stages between Gilgit and Tashkurgan, covered by nearly fifty post-runners who carried mail three times a week between Gilgit and Hunza, and from there once a week to Xinjiang. This profession is still known today but limited to the Hunza valley, as the post-runners are not allowed to cross international borders anymore.

Mr Shafi keeps up the tradition

Mr Shafi was the first post-runner I met on duty. While proceeding to Borit Lake early in the morning we accompanied him for a few miles, walking along with him on the way to Pasu, fifteen kilometres away from Gulmit. At five o'clock Mr Shafi was already on duty, wearing his khaki uniform and carrying bundles of the Gulmit mail to the next station, where another post-runner would take over. At his turning-point in Pasu a separate branch-office was given up in 1987 as nobody volunteered for this job, which gives an expense allowance of Rs 100 per month. On his way back Mr Shafi carries all the mail from further up the valley and empties the letter box in Hussaini.

There are twelve post-runners working between Aliabad and Sost, where one additional post office exists, besides the one in Gulmit. 'By government order,' Mr Shafi explains, 'we have to walk at least six kilometres on foot. The rest is up to us, we take any transport we choose—either bus or other vehicle like tractor, or bicycle.' I asked him why the car which delivers mail at Aliabad post office does not proceed any further, especially after the

completion of the Karakoram Highway, since the remaining distance between Aliabad and the border post at Sost accounts for only 75 kilometres. Mr Shafi has a plausible answer for this: 'If a car covered the whole distance, we post-runners would be jobless.' He earns Rs 1,800 and runs daily, except for Fridays and public holidays, carrying up to 40 kg but sometimes only around 10 kg. When he returns to Gulmit in the afternoon at about 4 pm, he has to do some additional work at the post-office. Once I met him when he was delivering telephone bills.

Letters have to be collected at the post-office itself. An unofficial way to send mail 'by hand' is also common—people give their letters to any jeep or wagon driver, or to friends and relatives who are travelling to the relevant destination. But the post-runners also deliver mail directly to their neighbours' houses, a favour I enjoyed many times myself. Mr Shafi started his job as a post-runner nine years ago. Before that he had worked only as a farmer *(zamindar)*. To become eligible for a pension means another sixteen years of government service. In a way, he is following in the footsteps of his late father, who worked at the telephone exchange during the reign of the Mir. At that time this private undertaking was financed by Mir Jamal Khan, who controlled by telephone the state of affairs in each village on a regular basis. Thus the hereditary ruler utilized modern technology for running his dominion.

The completion of the Karakoram Highway made possible new means of communication. The 'State Mail Express' carries the Pak-China mail. This van leaves Gilgit on Tuesdays for China across the Khunjerab Pass and returns on Thursdays from there. On its way back it picks up mail and the postman from Gulmit, to take him to his home in Central Hunza for his day off. The exchange of mail between China and Pakistan started in September 1985. This shows how important the Karakoram Highway is for both countries, both strategically and geographically. The KKH is the closest gateway to China for the western world.

CHAPTER 2

RULES AND REGULATIONS

Trying to communicate

Conducting an interview with N. S., my closest friend, appeared in a way, to be superficial and formal. Anyhow, I got to know her well while living in Gulmit. Once, teaching English to her daughter Z.P. and her nephew Aslam, I asked them, 'Who is your best friend and why?' Aslam answered, 'Karim, because we have been working together.' The same applies to our relationship, which was based on sharing household duties and agricultural work. We have also been talking, as far as sign language and broken Wakhi, Urdu, English, and German make conversation possible. In the end N. S., who has never attended school even for a single day, and who is only able to write her initials, acted as our interpreter when we tried to talk in Wakhi to some neighbours. She understood our Wakhi, what little there was. We had the impression N.S. comprehended everything in any kind of diction. Once, when it came to languages, her husband said 'She speaks Wakhi fluently'. But what was meant as a joke had for us a deeper meaning. She became the expert to consult when I wanted to know the origin of Wakhi words, or the name for things which are nowadays expressed in Urdu, or sometimes in English. Of course, searching for a Wakhi word for 'torch' is in vain as there has never been a torch in use traditionally. But many old Wakhi words are already forgotten in a changing society. Without formal school education N.S. found no access to Urdu, the medium which has been thought of as Pakistan's *lingua franca* since 1947, a fate she shares with many other women and elderly people of her village. Uneducated people converse mainly in their mother tongue and are fluent in several neighbouring dialects.

Within the 160 km-long Hunza Valley with its 35,000 inhabitants, we find four different languages. Burushaski is spoken by the majority (67.1%) in Central Hunza. This exotic tongue cannot be linked to any of the existing language families. Wakhi, the mother tongue of nearly one-fifth of the population, is confined to the northern part, while two old Indian languages are spoken further south: Shina (12.6%), and Domaaki which is spoken by a minority of sixty families in Hunza. The Dom belong to a scattered ethnic group of traditional musicians and blacksmiths which can be found all over the mountain chains of the Himalayas, the Karakoram, and the Hindu Kush.

Wakhi, being an oral language like the neighbouring ones, is in danger of being forgotten sooner or later, unless people start to write it down. In 1990, the 'Wakhi Culture Association' was founded by representatives of different villages in Ghujal who are keen to preserve their language. So far they have not agreed on a common script. Some use Arabic, others the Roman script, for the transcription of their own language, especially since they gained access to the books of A.L. Grünberg and I.M. Stéblin-Kamensky, two Russian linguists, who published their grammar and dictionary on the Wakhi language in the 1960s. Many more meetings of the 'Wakhi Culture Association' will have to be held for this problem to be solved. There are plans to invite Wakhi-speaking people from other areas in Northern Pakistan for further discussions.

D.L.R. Lorimer, the Political Agent in Gilgit from 1920-4, whose hobby was linguistics, laid the foundations for the recording of the Hunza languages, as well as for those of Gilgit and Yasin. Meticulously he prepared wordlists for Burushaski, Wakhi, Domaaki, Shina, Khowar, and Werchikwar, and published his collections of grammar, vocabulary, and stories. The forefather of all later linguists, Lorimer tried to unite all the inhabitants of Hunza under the term Hunzakuts:

> ...including *Wakhi*, Iranian people in the North, and the Shén people in the S.W. Now the people with whom all our enthusiasts are concerned are the Burushaski-speaking people living in the S.E. part of the Hunza river valley.
> (Lorimer 1958: 8)

Many writers afterwards talk only of the Burusho, the majority of the population, when they speak of Hunza, thus omitting other ethno-linguistic groups living close by.

In Gulmit, the first Wakhi-speaking village when travelling up the Hunza Valley, there is a lot of exchange with *Werchik* friends, as the Ghujali call all Burushos. Only one Burushaski-speaking family lives there: the members of the household of Raja Bahadur Khan, who belongs to the former ruling class of Central Hunza. An old widow from Kanjut—this is how she refers to Hunza proper—who got married in Gulmit a long time ago has refused to speak anything else but Burushaski. Conversing only in her mother tongue, she is an exception in an otherwise multilingual society where many visitors are entertained regularly.

N.S. faces no problem in talking to people in Burushaski. Multilingual women are the important mediators when women's programmes are in the offing. Burushaski and Urdu are spoken when the representatives of development programmes like the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) or the United Nations Development Programme (FAO/UNDP) visit the women's *tanzeem*. Office-bearers and members in this local women's organization sometimes complain that they understand only half of what is said, although the focus of interest is, in this case, on female activities, and their own sphere of experience. Sometimes an effort is made to translate everything into *xikwar* (Wakhi), and sometimes, Ferdana from Gulmit, who is working for AKRSP, comes and addresses the ladies directly in their mother tongue.

The same is true for L.P., daughter of Zafarullah Beg, and social organizer for UNDP. L.P. conducted a language course two years ago for illiterate women. Unfortunately, it was scheduled for the middle of summer, when most of the women were too busy to join in. N.S. could not find the time to take part in these Urdu classes taught by her niece. Her writing abilities are only challenged when signing cheques as president of the UNDP women's organization in Gulmit. As a self-taught tailoring expert she instructs other women of her village in dress-making. The women's group experiments with different designs and patterns, and for the benefit of the community, produces and sells items such as school uniforms, flags, and banners. N.S. also knows how to read the numbers on the tape measure which is important for her sewing job, but someone else has to write them down for her.

Since the women are used to oral communication, radio could be an important source of information and instruction. N.S. likes

to listen to music cassettes and radio transmissions, preferably from Radio Gilgit, especially the Burushaski programme in the evening. That gives her the chance to listen to some local news but again not in her own vernacular. Radio Gilgit broadcasts mainly in Shina and Burushaski. Ghujali people are still waiting for their own Wakhi programme—a written script would be of considerable help in this regard.

One of the unique features of Pakistan's mountain areas is its philological assets. On the other hand, the multitude of languages poses administrative and communication problems which affect the participation of many people in the mainstream activities.

Family life

N.S. was born into the old-established Sakhi family in Pasu, where her father is still living. She is the second youngest of four sisters and two brothers, both of whom are engineers and who left home early to study and to find job opportunities down-country. Their careers gave N. S. a chance to visit faraway places like Karachi in the south. Many women who have experienced city life have stopped wearing the traditional richly-embroidered and beautiful women's cap *(skeeth)* in exchange for the fashion of southern scarves. Of course, they all wear a *petek* (shawl) to cover their hair. Among family members rules are more relaxed. Once we were invited to dinner by close relatives and on the way Z. P. realized that the two of us were not wearing our *petek*. I was pleased by this remark because it meant that I already belonged to the community.

On many other occasions I was still treated as a newcomer, a fact that I certainly respected. The ladies—I was told—would sing and dance among themselves but never in my presence. Even Z. D., the young niece who helps in the household and is very fond of music, would not dare to dance when there were outsiders in the house. In former times public dancing was for men and women, but lately dancing in the open has been restricted to male dancers, and they only perform their classical repertoire on local holidays and for private functions to music played by Dom bands. They are the only musicians in Hunza, commanding their own vernacular and living mainly in

Mominabad, a village next to Karimabad. Another band of Dom musicians residing in the neighbouring village of Shishket is called to Gulmit on certain occasions. In traditional houses all over Hunza there is a special platform next to the entrance reserved for the band. The instruments in the band are always a set of three: *surnay, damaal* and *dadan* (oboe and two kinds of drums). Sometimes a small shepherd's flute *(tutek)* or a transverse flute *(gabi)* replaces the oboe. There are special dance tunes for different occasions; for example, in former times when the Mir entered the court his personal tune welcomed him, while other tunes are reserved for weddings and polo matches. Music-loving people like the Hunzakuts connect many different stories and feelings with these famous melodies. Part of their history and oral tradition lives in their music. Across the border in China, Tajik ladies are actively involved when music is performed: they play the tambourine *(daf)* in the regions adjacent to Hunza.

Having only one daughter, N. S. is very busy inside and outside the house. Apart from the psychological strain—society expects you to bear an heir, and he should preferably be the first-born—not having a son has practical problems. Having a son means that you can expect to get a daughter-in-law some day. She would move into her husband's family and alleviate the household's workload. It happens quite often that boys and girls get married, or at least engaged, at an early age, e.g., a sixteen year old boy can get married to a thirteen year old girl. In this case male friends tease the bridegroom about essential matters in married life. But what is more important is the fact that there is an extra worker in the family, especially when the parents are fairly old or ill, or no other helping hands are available. Modern education increases the uneven distribution of the household's workload, as children attend school rather than helping their mothers.

Z.P., N.S.'s daughter, has received higher education and is not living at home, which makes things even more complicated. She attends the Aga Khan Academy at Karimabad with six other girls from the village. Not only is she a bright student whose marks allowed her to continue her education after leaving the Girls D. J. (Diamond Jubilee; *see,* p.75) Middle School, but she is also the daughter of the former chairman of the Aga Khan Education Services. Ghulam-ud-din was the inspector of all D. J. schools in Hunza and takes a special interest in the education of his own

daughter. Today he is the president of the 'Gulmit Educational and Social Welfare Society' and of the 'Wakhi Culture Association'. Even her mother, who never attended school herself, is keen that Z.P. studies in Islamabad after passing her matriculation. When I inquired about marriage plans for her daughter, N.S. was very determined that her daughter would marry only after the completion of her studies.

Z. P. spends her holidays at home, dressed in the latest fashion of Karimabad, and is very concerned about her hairstyle. Nevertheless, she still takes off her high-heeled shoes and enjoys joining in when there is a lot of work in the fields. At the same time she has to concentrate on her studies and prepare for examinations. That is why she is exempted from being a full-time working family member by traditional standards. When she returns home she naturally gets a lot of attention and extra helpings of food. One year when there were hardly any milk products and eggs available for the family, Z. P. got an egg in the morning. That led her father to jokingly say, 'What a pity that the rest of us do not have a mother.' Z. P. loves to be with her family and friends in the village and gives her mother moral support.

When at Karimabad, her only chance to see her parents is on Fridays and other public holidays. Her father tries to visit her regularly. If he is busy his wife goes there with a family member or neighbour and spends half a day away from home, leaving by bus or wagon at six o'clock in the morning, and returning at noon when the girls have their lunch. She supplies Z. P. with apricot kernels, dried apricots and home-made bread *(qamishdon),* or sends these goodies through other villagers who are on their way to Karimabad. Once a month they telephone, and sometimes Z. P. writes letters to her mother which are read out to her by a relative.

Outings are limited for N. S. as there is a lot of work waiting at home, especially in summer. Her mother-in-law, who had been living with them, died many years ago. Her husband is often busy with honorary work and travelling. Only recently he helped set up the first English-medium school in Gulmit. Therefore she cannot rely on him as a full-time working member of the family.

To help N.S., Aslam, one of her nephews, lives with the family permanently, and one or two nieces take turns to help in the household and keep their aunt company—except for the hours

they spend at school. When Ghulam-ud-din is absent for a longer period, an additional male relative sleeps in the house. The family clan takes care of each other and sticks together even when traditional family patterns are falling apart.

Aslam's mother is the sister of our host and has a huge household of her own, including eight children. Nevertheless, she allows her eldest son to stay with Ghulam-ud-din and also comes from the neighbouring *muhallah* (hamlet) herself, to help and to see N.S. Aslam takes all his meals there: you get your food where you are working, it is as simple as that. This is most obvious at *keryar* (joint labour) times, when neighbours and relatives gather on the fields, help each other, and afterwards take their meal along with other members of the family they are supporting.

Meeting people

Women are busy the whole day long. There is little time to meet friends after the fulfilment of all their duties. Either they work together, attend women's *tanzeem* meetings which also require teamwork, or attend congregations at the local prayer house where many community members gather. As a non-Muslim, admission to religious worship and meeting places has been restricted for me. But when a new prayer house was under construction in Chamangul, I could see the separate rooms for men and women connected by an open door, so that everyone could listen to the *mukhi,* the chief religious functionary. The important prayers on Friday evenings and on *Chand Raat* (night of the new moon) are special village events when everybody dresses beautifully. The annual calendar of festivals gives several occasions for village gatherings. For several days beforehand everybody is busy with preparations, sewing festival clothes until the last minute and cooking special food for the community. N.S. has certain duties at the prayer house, and functions as a warden on religious holidays. Public performances are dominated by men, with the exception of nursery-class girls who are allowed to parade on festival days, when relatives and friends from other villages join in.

Going to local shops—there are a handful of little stalls situated around the central polo ground—to buy basic foodstuffs, or paying a visit to the health centre, gives one a chance to

interrupt the daily routine work. Even more important is the arrival of relatives from neighbouring villages. Some come unexpectedly, others are awaited on religious and public holidays or during vacation time, while a third group announce their arrival through modern telecommunication. Ghulam-ud-din's house shares with very few private homes in this village of more than two hundred houses, the luxury of a telephone set. It always tempts people to drop in just to make a call.

You also meet people when you are invited to other homes. A *dawat* is a special invitation providing a change of diet. The best available food is offered, which means meat, a dish for rare occasions. These invitations take place when beloved relatives and good old friends are visiting, and for honoured people living in the village like the doctor, nurses, and foreigners. We were often invited before leaving to farewell dinners and lunches, and could hardly keep up with the different *dawats* of neighbours and friends.

I was the guest of honour at the birthday party of one-year-old Waqil. He is the only son after eight daughters in a family of teachers—a good enough reason to have a big party, or so his parents thought. The *mukhi* who was present said the prayers and cut the first slice of the birthday cake together with the little boy. On occasions like this I was always asked to take photographs. Traditionally there is no custom of celebrating birthdays. For many people the exact date on which they were born is of no importance at all. It never really mattered, or changed anything, especially in a society with an oral tradition where nobody keeps a written record. Sometimes people alter their year of birth when it suits them, like a friend of ours who was in reality too old to play in a football team of youngsters. Thus he changed his birthday according to the requirements. There are official and unofficial birthdays in many cases, and the age of old people is a big question-mark in itself. The famous longevity of the Hunzakuts seems to be a myth without proof. People appear old and worn out at a pretty early age because of the hard work and the harsh climate at these altitudes. The environment erodes their strength and energy. My own judgement often failed me, and I could not distinguish between mothers and grandmothers. In Hunza one finds a lot of large families, and women in their late thirties may have given birth to more than ten children,

although not all of them survive. A drastic example is given in the Gilgit Agency Political Diary when reporting on the Rani of Nagar's illness:

> She has now recovered but her health is still poor. As she has presented the Mir with thirty-five children, of whom seven are living, occasional poor health is not a matter for surprise.
>
> (Gilgit Agency Political Diary July 1936: 260)

The occasion of a new-born baby gives relatives and neighbours a welcome opportunity for a visit to the rejoicing home.

How to behave

In a Wakhi house *(xun)* many generations and family members live together under one roof. Family sizes vary between a few persons to up to twenty members sharing what is basically a one-roomed house. The daily routine involves certain rules and regulations which are expressed in different habits and which are passed on from one generation to the other. My first observation in this regard focused on the allocation of sitting-places in the home. The housewife appears to be the most active person, controlling the stores in the back of the house. This is her special sphere. For long hours she is occupied with the preparation of food for the whole family. Her normal place is up on the platform behind the locally-produced *buxari* (stove) from where she can survey the whole scene. The preparation and distribution of food is done from here. Light enters the house only through a hole in the roof—windows were not common in former times, and what was once the privilege of palaces has only recently been introduced into modern buildings. The centre of the traditional *xun* is the gathering place around the fireplace, underneath the smokehole. Especially in winter one comes as close as possible to the warmest spot in the house. On both sides there are platforms *(raz)* for sitting and sleeping. When one enters the house the right platform is assigned to men, the left one to women. Guests are asked to rest against the pillars supporting the flat roof and to sit in the corner of their respective platform, which is the place closest to the fire and so very important in

winter. These places of honour are normally occupied by the family in order of importance. There is a second level of platforms which are used for sleeping. Parents, small children, and young girls rest on the left side and boys or young couples on the opposite platform. During the day the bedding gets rolled up and there is ample space for sitting.

The same order of distinction applies during the meals. Guests are served first with the best food while family members follow afterwards. The housewife eats last together with the children. In our family the daughter and nieces sit and eat with N. S., and the more or less grown-up nephew would sit with us opposite the *buxari*. A *dastar khan* (special cloth on which food is served) is spread on the ground and male family members and guests eat first. When they have finished, food is passed 'upstairs' and the housewife and children eat what is left over.

It is still a custom to drink salted tea in most of the families, even if sugar, which is more costly, is available and not only reserved for visitors. I sometimes preferred a cup of salted tea myself on a hot day when I had been outside for a long time. The salt found near Shimshal, a village close to the Chinese border, which was traditionally used, has been replaced by iodized salt called 'Markhor' which is recommended by the Health Service to all the villagers. Thus cases of goitre have been reduced. In earlier times, tea was a rare commodity and was mainly consumed at the Mir's palace. Instead of tea, people used to soak dried apricots in water overnight and drink it for breakfast. The amount of tea we drank all day long seemed extraordinary to N. S. She made up a new clan name when Hermann asked for a fifth cup after a long day's walk, and jokingly told everybody that he belonged to the *choy kutor,* which means the 'clan of the tea drinkers'.

Normally a guest is not allowed to do the slightest bit of work, not even to pass a cup of tea, but I was happy when I managed to break these rules, which made me feel very uncomfortable in the beginning. Once when N.S. fell ill I was allowed to help in the daily routine. Step by step I convinced our hosts that it did not harm me to do some work around the house. They constantly worried that I would do too much—which I never did—but I probably looked as exhausted as those who had worked all day, and sometimes half the night.

In the beginning it was difficult, but by spending the better part of the day together we became accustomed to each other. Sometimes it was difficult for us to get all our own work done and to keep a record of all the events in the village. Often the call for a cup of tea would come and happily we would take a break. It was good in a way to spend as much time as possible with the family because it was a very hospitable house. We got to know many people, and were able to make contacts and gather important information easily. Ghulam-ud-din became interested in our Wakhi topic and would follow up some unsolved questions on his own when he met the right person. Interest in the books written by Grünberg and Stéblin-Kamensky grew constantly, and we would sit together every night and study the transcription which was new to our Wakhi friends. Hermann could read but could not understand most of the text which they, of course, were able to, and they translated for us what we did not understand. Thus grew a very fruitful exchange, which fitted into our philosophy of give and take. After a while, we were left alone when we wanted to study in our room, and even when I stayed alone in Gulmit everyone respected my wish when I wanted to write or read on my own, although in the beginning, N. S. thought that I stayed in my room because I was sad. To be alone is just not a common experience in a society where the traditional one-room house is shared with all members of a family—ordinarily up to three generations.

To be part of the family meant to participate in work and in enjoyment. On festival days, when everybody was keen to show off their new clothes, N. S. would prepare something for me as well. Sometimes I would do her a favour in return. Occasionally I cooked lunch while she was absent. When she came back, she called me her *shirin xui* (sweet sister), a compliment I liked very much.

Eventually we learnt the different forms of greetings and the code of manners which are characteristic of Ghujali society. Above all, I remember the extreme politeness of the Wakhi, and their openness. Barrow, who visited the Wakhan at the end of the nineteenth century, made the same observation.

> One great charm in travelling amongst the Tajik races is the unbounded hospitality with which one meets...They seem on the whole honest, truthful and religious, and there is a happy absence of fanaticism.
>
> (Barrow 1888: vii)

In Gulmit, as soon as someone enters the house everybody rises, unless it is a family member. Leaving is less formal. People would often just walk out of the room without any explanation, only saying *'yeh baf'* (it is all right), an informal way of saying 'good-bye' among the Ghujali. When I started using *yeh baf* people laughed appreciatively, especially the women, since I had at least made an effort to learn their language and its connotation. One Wakhi rule of politeness: while sitting on different platforms in the *xun* it is very important not to turn your back on someone else. Meeting a person outside the house, one is expected to ask questions about his health and that of all his family members. You are always asked where you have come from and where you are going. Everybody knows your movements, and you cannot escape unseen. This not only signifies curiosity but also assures you of being protected.

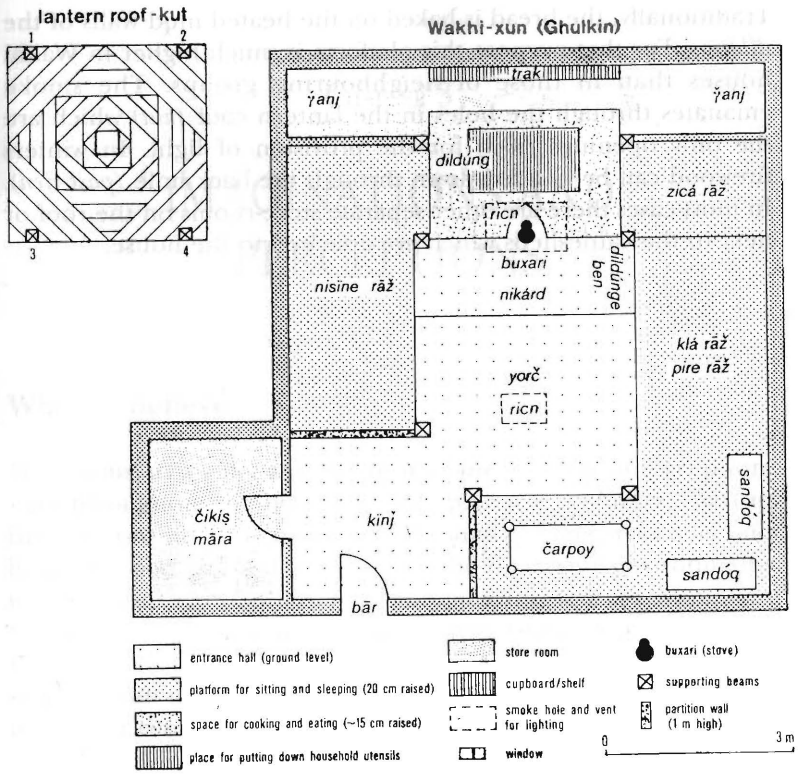
In recent years men have been leaving the village, to earn money or for education purposes, but women are still stuck with the daily routine work. Migration has made their situation more severe, and has increased their burden. Since most children attend classes, women are left without the helping hands of other family members. In addition to their regular duties they have to take over all the minor jobs formerly carried out by youngsters, like grazing cattle, or helping in the house and fields. At least one elderly man is, formally, required to head the home. Nevertheless, all responsibilities for household management rests on female shoulders when able-bodied male family members are absent. In a patriarchal society it is a problem for women to live on their own, even if they are nominally running the household alone, as one of our neighours, a young widow, does. However, the support of other relatives is assured when it is needed.

It is even more difficult for a single woman to enjoy today's increased mobility and to leave the village on her own. She is normally accompanied on any journey by a male relative or, nowadays, by a female travel companion. When returning to their college female students are chaperoned by a father, brother, or uncle. There are many differences between the genders. Women are—as a rule—not entitled to inherit land, which makes it awkward if there is no male issue. During my stay in Gulmit, as a foreigner I enjoyed the freedom of mobility and, at the same time, gathered an insight into the female sphere.

After a while, when we were more familiar, I greeted N.S., and said good-bye when I left for a longer time, in the same way as local women do: I kissed her hand and she mine simultaneously. This is done up to three times, and I soon realized that you can look deep into one another's eyes while kissing hands. This I thought was a nice way of showing affection, and a sign of conspiracy amongst women. Women also occasionally kiss men's hands, mainly of relatives and elderly people. As a sign of respect they would spin their right hand around, forming circles, a very old tradition still to be seen, largely among old women. One pays honour according to rank, e.g., an old lady might do that movement when greeting her grandson, an elderly relative, or a male or female guest. When somebody dies an old lady also moves her hand in the same manner while talking of the deceased. N.S. made the circle when something embarrassing was mentioned, as if to say, 'do not mention it', like other people pull the lobe of their ear several times and being ashamed say *tobaa tobaa* (I am sorry). Once she had to walk around Hermann in a circle by accident while harvesting potatoes and jokingly said, 'I have not been to your wedding, that's why I have to pay respect to you now.'

Men in Ghujal embrace each other, pressing the body to one another's breast until—so it seems—they can feel the other's heartbeat. When they meet again after a long period they repeat this greeting up to three times. Wakhi people across the border in Xinjiang can be identified by their custom of men kissing the back of each other's hand and women kissing the inside of men's hands. People who are confronted with different rules and regulations can make many mistakes. The honourable Wakhi people have always been so polite in dropping friendly hints to me when I did not understand their customs. Only after a long period did some of their behaviour patterns become very familiar to me.

The basic principle of the traditional Wakhi house is the combination of all human activities in one open connected space. The different functions of the house are located around the central fire-place *(buxari)*. Next to the entrance on the left side we find the store-room *(chikis* or *mara)* which can be closed by a separate door. The entrance space *(kinj)* comprises the lowest level of the house as well as the place *(yorch)* where all footwear



The traditional Wakhi house

has to be left. On the right and on the left two elevated platforms are to be found which are utilized for sitting during the day and for sleeping at night *(nisine raz* and *kla raz)*. They are built of mud, and are covered by straw and rugs woven from yak and goat hair. During the day the beds are rolled up and stored next to the retaining walls, to be unrolled at night. These spaces are differentiated by gender and degrees of honour. The chief guest is to be placed on the right side next to the fire-place, from where a maximum of comfort and a good view is secured. Behind the cooking platform *(dildung),* the reserved working space for women begins. Here all utensils are displayed in a cupboard *(trak),* and edibles are stored in special containers *(ganj).*

Traditionally, the bread is baked on the heated mud walls of the *dildung*. For that purpose this platform is much higher in Wakhi houses than in those of neighbouring groups. The smoke emanates through the holes in the lantern roof *(kut)* which are the only openings *(ricn)* for the provision of light. In winters firewood can be handed down through the back hole *(past ricn)*. In most cases there are other separate store-rooms on the roof or next to the cattlesheds which are attached to the house.

CHAPTER 3

IMAGINATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

What to believe

Mountains, as a rule, and the roof of the world is no exception, have throughout the history of man played a prominent part in his relationship with nature. Peaks and glaciers, rockfalls and landslides pose a threat to survival in these extreme environments which, nevertheless, offer abundant natural resources. Mountain habitats have also through the ages given refuge to many ethno-linguistic groups which have adapted their lives to the daily struggle with nature. Even today traditional beliefs have a strong impact on rites and rituals accompanying the seasonal cycles.

Miracles at the shrine of Hussaini

The *ziarat* (shrine) of Hussaini was constructed in honour of Sultan Shah Talib. Its history is closely connected with the first Wakhi settlement there.

According to oral tradition, the Pasu attacked Hussaini before the time of Trakhan, who was the king of Gilgit in the twelfth century. At the time of the invasion Hussaini was inhabited by an ethnic group called Ghussamogh, whose origin cannot be traced. Most of the autochthonous population of Hussaini was expelled by the Pasu and many were killed in that severe battle. Afterwards Hussaini was totally taken over by the Wakhi, Sabz Ali being among the first Wakhi settlers.

Ali Gohar told me about a holy man *(wali, buzurg)* called Shah Talib who had led a blameless religious life in Jumgan in

Afghanistan before he travelled to this region. Eventually, he died in Hussaini and was buried there. Over his grave a shrine was erected which was later enlarged and named Gumbiz by the family of Sabz Ali. There is something special about this shrine. Every evening during the long period of Wakhi colonization, people saw a light shining inside the shrine. Many pilgrims visited Gumbiz after its construction and prayed there when in need. Sheep, goats, and oxen which strayed near the shrine were sacrificed, their meat cooked and distributed among the people of Hussaini. Horses were also immolated and their meat eaten.

At that time Gumbiz was surrounded by grassland and below it there were large fields. According to Ali Gohar, the number of houses was four times more than at present, and the riverbed so narrow that you could easily throw a stone across to Zarabad with your left hand. When the big rockfall of Sarat happened in 1858, and the Hunza river was dammed up by heavy mudflow, people saw the roof of the shrine floating on the lake which had come into existence as a consequence of the damming of the river. Afterwards, the dam burst and the water ran down the riverbed. Then the miracle happened, and the on-lookers could not believe what they saw: the shrine's roof had returned to its original place. But Hussaini had lost a substantial part of its cultivated lands and many people had to look for new habitations.

One day a *pir* from Sarikol came to Hussaini. At night when it became dark he asked for the copper lamp which belonged to the shrine. Within a few minutes of being provided with the lamp, the entire house in which he was staying began to shake, as if in an earthquake. The *pir* started to recite religious songs and told the people to take the lamp back to the shrine. Immediately the earth stopped moving.

About a hundred years ago, Daulat Qadam noticed that whenever someone shouted at the top of his voice near the shrine he became dumb. Ali Gohar remembers that a lot of people came to the shrine in Hussaini with offerings and special requests. The *mirs* of Hunza were regular visitors as well. Mir Muhammed Nazim Khan came twice a year to immolate thirty to forty sheep, goats, or yaks. Mir Ghazan Khan paid a visit every Friday when he was staying at Gulmit; otherwise, he sent donations from Baltit.

Religious leaders of different communities have become concerned about the veneration of numerous shrines by the local

people. This phenomenon reflects traditional belief systems which are common in many high mountain regions. Peaks and glaciers as well as caves have become attractions for pilgrims who acknowledge the magnificence of mountains as a symbol of superior power and as a central focus of their lives. I have observed that a considerable number of pilgrims visit the *ziarat* in Hussaini on specific occasions. Newly-married couples have to approach the shrine on foot and walk around it on their wedding day. If the procession of a marriage party on its way to the bridegroom's house is passing by Gumbiz, the processionists are not allowed to walk above the shrine, instead they have to take the track below. Nobody would dare to proceed on the road above as this would be tempting fate. The *ziarat* of Hussaini is also supposed to be a fertility shrine and is very popular even now with childless couples. A donation box surrounded by colourful flags is installed close to the Karakoram Highway where many a traveller stops to pay his respect.

Khalifa and traditional ceremonies

Khalifas fulfil many duties in the villages of the Karakoram-Hindu Kush, especially in the Ismaili community, where they are responsible for performing the rites of passage. As local lay priests, *khalifas* not only lead prayers but also function as healers and soothsayers. They also make *taweez* (talismans) against evil influences. Oral tradition provides ample references to their importance. There are a number of folk tales in which *khalifas* play a role similar to that of a *bitan* (shaman) regarding prophecies, or helping to make rainfall, or even fighting a *bilas* (female demon). Official Islam has tried to stop all these superstitious beliefs, but still today *khalifas* are asked to the house and not only to perform religious ceremonies.

I was told the story of a *khalifa* whom a friend of mine had consulted after weeks of pain in the liver-area. In order to cure her, the *khalifa* wrote a *surah* from the Holy Koran on a piece of paper. Before the ink dried he washed it down into a glass of water and asked the patient to drink the mixture of water and ink. Then he put the wet piece of paper on which the *surah* had been written onto the affected area of the body, and after a while

the pain went away. As several methods to help the patient were applied at the same time, it is of course, not easy to say which ones really did cure her, but finally she was well again.

I observed a *khalifa* at work when a close member of our family died. *Khalifas* are called to conduct religious ceremonies at births, weddings, and funerals. They normally inherit their role from their fathers, who also teach them to read the Holy Koran, at an early age. I learnt that every *kutor* (clan) has its own *khalifa,* who is often related to the members of the clan. The funeral ceremony I witnessed was connected with a tragic accident. The deceased—father of a small son—was missing after he had been seen for the last time near a bridge over the Hunza river at dusk one evening on his way to his relatives in Hussaini. He was short-sighted and sometimes had difficulty in finding his way around. People presumed that he had fallen from a cliff into the river, which had risen enormously and was on the same level as the footpath. Relatives and friends searched for him for three days, but in vain. After the third day they declared him dead and proceeded with the traditional ceremony.

Normally the dead body is wrapped in a piece of cloth and buried on the same day. Afterwards small wicks are twisted and prayers said, which in Wakhi are called *delil.* On the second evening the *delil* ceremony is repeated. In the meantime, relatives and neighbours come for condolence, bringing food: nobody is allowed to prepare any food during the first three days in the house of a deceased person. On the morning of the third day all the other villagers come for condolence prayers *(fateha).* The same day members of the *kutor* go to the cemetery and finally close the grave *(raz wendaq).* They also slaughter a male sheep for sacrificial purposes. Nowadays, the number of sacrificial animals has been reduced to a minimum through public consent, thus avoiding unnecessary indebtedness and competition between different villagers as happened in the past.

On the evening of the third day the *cherag roshan* ceremony takes place. We went to the house of the deceased where his mother and one of his brothers were living. Unfortunately his brother, who was in Islamabad, could not be informed in time and thus was not present. During the ceremony that day a special seating arrangement had to be observed. The *khalifa* sat on the platform to the left of the entrance, his traditional seat which is

named accordingly, while next to him the guests of honour sat, such as the *lambardar, arbab* and *mukhi.* All the male relatives sat on the platform to the right of the entrance. The place next to the *buxari,* and traditionally the place of honour, was reserved for the mother of the deceased, who was the chief mourner. After the initial prayers were said, people got up one by one and uttered words of condolence to her in remembrance of the deceased. Next to the mother sat her sister, but the deceased's wife was in the background seated close to the door leading to the back yard. I observed the whole ceremony from the platform opposite the *khalifa's,* where I was surrounded by all the female mourners.

Everyone listened to the prayers connected with the *cherag roshan* ceremony (which were collected and edited in the sixties by Qudratullah Beg from Central Hunza). They had been inspired by the teachings of the tenth-century philosopher Nasir-i-Kisrau. This famous saint influenced the religious canon and had a lasting effect in Hunza. While Khalifa Nazar was reading out these prayers he was, at the same time, twisting a wick from cotton wool. At the end of the recitation the wick which he had wound around his hand was about 50 cm long. Then he cut the thread at one point, put all the pieces into a traditional lamp made out of steatite, and poured the fat of a slaughtered sheep over them. He lit the wicks and put the 'three-day lamp' back onto the wall which separated the *khalifa's* platform from the entrance, where it burnt until the end of the evening.

After the main prayers *dilia* is eaten by the entire mourning congregation. Members of the *kutor* had slaughtered a sheep, cooked it in a big pot *(zama)*—property of each *kutor*—on the central fireplace, and put wheat grain into the broth, which turns it into a porridge. Sometimes butter or wheat flour is added to thicken it. Everybody got a piece of meat: a very delicious dish altogether. After the third day of mourning, meals are allowed to be cooked again in the house of the deceased. Among the Wakhi these mourning ceremonies last for three days; with the Burushos of Central Hunza, the ceremonies are observed for up to seven days.

When the *cherag roshan* ceremony came to its end the family first of all thanked the *khalifa* for his services and gave him presents in the form of a pullover, shoes, and a shirt in their

original packing. In former times the *khalifa* would get clothing worn by the deceased. The Budule, one of the eight different clans in Gulmit, had sent representatives of each family so that the grand old house was crowded with people. The clan leaders bade farewell to the guests, thanking them for coming, while the women stood outside waving farewell in the traditional manner.

As soon as the brother of the deceased arrived, people went again to pay him a visit of condolence, and after seven days the relatives gathered for the traditional ceremony called *hub ror chapik*—the bread of the seventh day. They repeated their visit to the bereaved family on the fortieth day. On a certain auspicious day, people of our village remember all the deceased of the previous year by preparing a special bread which is distributed among the clan's households by the families of the deceased. Thus the memory of the dead is kept alive. Bread fulfils in Wakhi society a special function, and is connected with the rituals of many festivals.

A *khalifa* is also called to the house of his relatives to perform the name-giving ceremony, normally seven days after a child has been born, and at the time of circumcision. The circumcision ceremony, called *xatna* (cutting), is organized by the *kutor* but celebrated in the respective household. Normally it is done in September or October. A *khalifa* reads the appropriate prayers and gets presents in the form of natural products or clothes.

I was more than pleased when I was introduced to Abdul Mohammed from Dalgiram, who happened to be the son of the famous *khalifa,* Feraghat, of whom I had heard before in a different context. The late Feraghat was Lorimer's teacher of Wakhi for three months, together with Qudratullah Beg, when Lorimer was living in Aliabad in 1934-5. Khalifa Feraghat went five times to Bombay with a religious mission to meet the legendary Aga Khan III, Shah Aga Sultan Muhammad Shah, who was the leader of the community from 1885 to 1957, and was buried in Aswan (Egypt). According to his son, Feraghat himself reached the age of 104 years.

This is the story behind Abdul Mohammed's own 'career' as a *khalifa.* Without ever attending a formal or secular school he was taught Persian and other subjects by his father. Both his father and grandfather had been *khalifas* and he followed the tradition. He was also a *zamindar* (farmer). His training as a *khalifa* was

provided by his father, the only local person in contact with the *pirs* in Kashgaria and Bombay. When Abdul Mohammed turned twenty, he started to perform the various ceremonies, mainly when his father was absent. His responsibilities included prayers at funerals and weddings, rituals as a healer, and the services of a *mukhi* in the *jamaat khana.* Everyone from Gulmit and Goz would call him to their house when they faced a problem. For his services they remunerated him in kind. Abdul Mohammed is now sixty-nine years old and has two sons and one daughter. He has travelled as far as Karachi, where he had the opportunity of visiting his younger son who studies and works there. Nine people live in his house, since his elder son had to return from Saudi Arabia where he had worked as a shopkeeper for eight years. His family now lives permanently in Dalgiram with Abdul Mohammed and his wife. Their house is easy to find: it is not far away from the *jamaat khana.*

Mr Fida Ali from Goz, who was the only teacher at the D. J. Girls Primary School until 1974, is also a well-known *khalifa.* I met him in front of his house where he was busy forming a tray of willow twigs for the apricot-drying season. He told me that he also produces a lot of his own food. Asked about his education, he explained that he was so occupied with his tasks as a *khalifa,* especially at the time of his wedding, that he completed his matric course only later on. He went to Gilgit for two months to attend an Arabic course and used to teach Persian at the Boys High School. Nowadays, his subjects are Urdu and social sciences for the middle school, and the teachings of the Holy Koran for the higher classes. Thus he is entitled to a regular salary, and is able to combine his religious duties with the job of feeding his large family of five daughters and three sons.

A famous shaman from Kamaris

Before I heard of Bibi Khand, the famous *bitan* (fortune-teller) from Kamaris, I met her by chance while walking to the village north of Gulmit to cross over to Ghulkin. She was standing in front of her house and somehow attracted me, being a very interesting-looking woman with gleaming eyes. I felt drawn towards her and greeted her, fascinated by her intense looks and

colourful dress. She was wearing a yellow-red *shalwar kamiz*—red being the favourite colour of many Ghujali women and also of their Tajik neighbours—and the traditional *skeeth*. Her face was open and she looked as if she was questioning me in a way.

I did not think of her again until a close friend asked us if he could take us to Bibi Khand, the famous *bitan* of Kamaris. Entering her house I recognized her as the woman of my previous encounter. *Khand* means 'sweet' in Persian, the former court language of Hunza. When you talk to her you get the feeling that she really lives up to her name. Before we were allowed to meet her we had to wait outside for quite a long time, as we had come on a public holiday and a whole family had gone in before us. Later on we learnt that some family problems had been the topic of consultation. Other people came for many different reasons to ask her advice.

From our friend we enquired about the remuneration for her services and he suggested that any gift or a small sum of money would do. He himself was very keen to ask her about his future and begged us not to tell anybody that he had gone see Bibi Khand. This was the actual reason why he had taken us there, doing us a favour at the same time. He could be sure that we would keep his secret as they conversed in Wakhi in a low voice. Whatever one wishes to give to Bibi Khand, one has to hand it over to her before she tells the future for you. As I learnt later on when I went for an interview, she needs to hold something in her hands that belongs to the person who is seeking her advice—be it money, jewellery, etc.—on which she fixes her eyes. We visited her on a cold rainy day at the end of April. I remember a weird atmosphere on entering her *xun* for the first time: the house dark and smoky, her husband cowering next to the open fire-place, warming his hands but wearing only a felt jacket over his naked shoulders. In the background stood a loom which her son uses for weaving *sherma* (rugs) out of goat and yak hair, which made the room even smaller, overcrowded as it was by a large number of family members and neighbours.

When asked about our future Bibi Khand did not give a very detailed picture, perhaps because she did not know us. Or else our translator did not pass on all she said out of sheer politeness. I was told afterwards by another friend that he once took the Dutch Ambassador and his wife to her. They enquired about

their childless state and asked about the future in this regard. Bibi Khand advised the Ambassador to look for a second wife, which, of course, their young companion did not translate for them knowing that it would hurt them and would be contrary to their customs. Perhaps our own translator saved us from some awkward revelations and frustrations. What Bibi Khand told us was, amazingly, very much to the point—she said that we walked from mountain to mountain and made a living out of that, that we were drawing maps and writing books. Her daughter-in-law offered us tea and bread while the next customers arrived. We knew them and had heard about their problem—they had been burgled the previous night. I was astonished that they went to Bibi Khand to find out about the thieves who had broken into their shop, close to the Karakoram Highway.

Soothsayers are still an integral phenomenon of daily life in the Karakoram, and the existence of ghosts is taken for granted. When I was alone in Gulmit I was given the option of sleeping in the same room with the family so as to feel safe from *bilas*. N. S. often teased her nieces, also calling them *bilas,* especially when she was annoyed.

I once spent a most amusing evening with N.S. and her nephew, who had come over for dinner. She told us the story of a *ghuw petr* (literally translated this would mean, 'son of a cow', i.e., half human, half calf) which had been born in Ghulkin that same day. Apparently the body looked like a cow and the head and extremities like those of a boy. N. S. had also listened to Radio Gilgit Burushaski Programme and heard that the Health Centre had withdrawn from circulation a certain medicine that they used to distribute in their centres. They told the audience that it was harmful to use this injection on the human body, but that it could be given to cows. For N.S this was a plausible explanation for the unusual birth case, since she had heard it said that the cow had earlier on been given that same injection. N. S. compared this case with another one from Danyor where a cow had given birth to twin boys. The cow had to be slaughtered but the two boys were brought to the hospital. With all this 'evidence' in mind she suggested that her nephew should make a phone call to Ghulkin to announce the arrival of a foreign guest (myself) who was very interested in the *ghuw petr* and wanted to take pictures. N.S. was in a cheerful mood and I was not

certain if she really believed the whole story. We had a lot of fun, and when she remarked, 'what the two of us did not achieve was done by a cow'—hinting at not having borne sons—I nearly spilled all the tea she had just poured me because I was shaking with laughter. Afterwards she told Rahmat to make a call to Ghulkin. The local doctor's sister-in-law answered and was not in a friendly mood at all. 'How shameless,' she scolded and said, 'I do not recognize you, Rahmat, you are normally such a sensible person.' Nevertheless, she invited me to her house for a cup of tea any time out of pure hospitality, but she did not want to hear of the real motive of my visit. She did not want to listen to that nonsense, and hung up on us.

Belief in supernatural beings is widespread regardless of age, gender, and level of education. Most of these beliefs are related to the spread of diseases, childlessness, and auspicious days. This is the reason why people like Bibi Khand are held in great esteem, and have gained high authority in solving these matters.

I was keen to interview Bibi Khand because I was curious about her initiation, and one day she agreed to talk to me. She told me that she was born in Sost as one of two children, the other, a boy, was now dead. After her marriage to Ghulam Hussain in Dalgiram she left home, and later on moved with him to Kamaris, where he had been presented with a piece of land by the Mir of Hunza. It is difficult to tell her age because she kept no track of it as it is of no importance to her, and records are not kept in Gulmit by anybody; other people estimated her age to be around sixty. She has borne five daughters and two sons. The house in Kamaris is shared with one son who is a shopkeeper in Goz. The son has seven daughters and one son. Altogether, there are twelve members of the family living together in the traditional one-room house. Bibi Khand's husband again sat next to the *buxari* during the interview, but not as motionless as during her audience session.

Bibi Khand told me that after they had moved to Kamaris the fairies came to her, which can be easily imagined as the geographically elevated position of Kamaris favours such an encounter. Perched in front of high mountains and the Bulkish glacier, the house is close to the forces of nature that lower over the village. No one else in the family has inherited the predisposition of being a *bitan*. Nowadays, she is the only *bitan* in

Kamaris and Gulmit, a second female soothsayer having stopped acting as *bitan*. Bibi Khand has never left her village but is well known all over the Hunza valley. A lot of people come from faraway places to see her, especially on Fridays, their day off, but she is available on any other day as well. 'Fortune-telling comes easy to me when I am consulted by honest people,' she explained. Her clients have health, fertility, or marriage problems, or have lost something (often cattle). Once, when a Fokker aircraft disappeared on its way from Gilgit to Islamabad in 1989 with forty passengers originating mainly from the Northern Areas, and could not be traced, family members of the missing relatives consulted different *bitan*. Some were told that the aircraft had been hijacked to Afghanistan and the passengers would be kept prisoners, others had visions of its landing in India. The more likely explanation is that the plane had crashed in this rugged and dangerous mountain terrain, although the pilots had been very experienced ones. There is another rumour too, and that was that the captain had been a passionate mountaineer and had been looking for a new access route to Nanga Parbat from above. Thus they might have left the regular course which offers spectacular views of the Himalayas and Karakorams. Anyhow, the plane, or what is left of it, has still not been located and neither the search parties nor the *bitan* could help.

Many of Bibi Khand's clients are regular customers and often return to thank her when her prophecy has come true. They give donations and presents of different kinds or money. Bibi Khand might have visions of people and events in her dreams but she does not practise palmistry. She knows about her own future and that of her family. When we leave she sees us off but is so weak that she is hardly able to stand upright. I only hope that she will trust in modern medicine, or at least consult one of her colleagues, the traditional local healers.

Local healers

I came across a number of local healers, especially in the field of traditional bone-setting, an ability they have learnt from their fathers and which they will pass on to their sons. People consult these local medicine-men even if there is a government hospital

or a health centre in the same village, and cases are known where all the local 'doctors' are consulted. Some people go for treatment as far as Gilgit, but if they feel that the doctors there cannot help, they revert to the healers in their own village. Those who have the reputation of experts in curing dislocations of joints also give advice on many other diseases and act as local dentists, the closest dentist being twenty miles away in Karimabad. This gentleman has established the first practice there only recently. This is a beneficial development bringing modern amenities to Hunza; earlier, a one-hundred-mile journey to Gilgit had to be undertaken to visit the nearest dentist.

In summer, when the mulberries are ripe, the local bone-setters have their peak season. The year I was there a number of children fell out of different fruit trees, one little girl breaking both her arms. I was present when Zafarullah Beg checked the broken arm of a little boy. He removed the cotton wool, bark strips, and bandage he had put around it earlier, which was similar to casting with plaster. The wrist was moved to see if it could be done easily and without pain. He then applied some salt water to the arm, as salt is believed to be a painkiller. Sometimes an egg is also rubbed onto a broken bone to accelerate the healing process. In the end he put the bark strips back around the boy's arm, which rested in a sling until it was totally healed.

Zafarullah showed me the 'machine' which he uses for resetting dislocations. It consists of wooden pegs of different diameters rammed into the ground. Their upper part is split to make room for a wooden wedge (locally called *kheel*) which is driven into the fixed peg to tighten a cotton band. This band is put around the dislocated limb and tied to the fixed peg. Bones and joints are set by driving another *kheel* into the peg which is anchored in the ground. This tightens the band around the concerned area which pops the joint back into its place.

If it is a knee or hip dislocation, the *kheel* is tied to the medial part of the leg, while pressure is applied from the top. At the same time, someone pulls and twists the leg from the ankle. Dialla, a Canadian kinaesthesia specialist, learnt in Gulmit about a method which is used for getting rid of joint stiffness, back pain, and even jaundice. The bark of a special tree called *khaff choo* is dried and powdered. The powder is then rolled and mixed

with carbon, and applied to the affected area with the help of saliva. The paste is then exposed to fire, as it is believed that all the pain gets sucked out in this manner and the illness leaves the body. Only a scar might be left afterwards.

Zafar's healing methods are well known all over Ghujal. He was called several times when mountaineers had had accidents while climbing the peaks in Hunza. As first aid the local practices might be helpful, but the need for a real orthopaedic doctor is quite obvious. Dialla suggests at least a physiotherapy centre somewhere central like Gilgit, for chronic diseases, long-term treatment, and the manufacturing of prostheses. Financial support would have to be provided to the families of patients, especially when a lot of travelling is involved in visiting a specialist in any medical field. The combination and interrelation of traditional methods and modern facilities would help the local people best.

Rahmat, a local teacher and friend of ours, told me that one of his students had to repeat each and every class until it was realized that poor eyesight was the cause of his problems. He used to bend extremely low over his books, which is a habit with many students as they read at home sitting on the floor with their books on their legs. It never occured to the boy's teachers that his was not a habitual problem. At school, even if there is any furniture, the size of chairs and desks often does not fit the physiognomy of the students. When Rahmat realized the cause of the boy's difficulties he sent him to an eye specialist in Gilgit. Despite the existence of the Karakoram Highway, a journey to Gilgit is no easy undertaking for most of the villagers. In the case of the student, his father had to accompany him. When they reached the clinic the ophthamologist was absent and the family had to return without having the boy's eyes checked. As the family is poor and the father a busy farmer working to feed his nine children, they have failed to undertake the journey again and the son has had to suffer further.

Eye problems are fairly common in Hunza, and in many cases an operation is necessary, which cannot be done in Gilgit. That requires more travelling and money, and an overland journey down-country can take a long time, depending on weather and road conditions. In the case of a girl with paralysed legs in our village, technical help in the form of a wheelchair was made

available, but the local roads made it impossible for her to utilize the contraption, and her mother had to carry the nearly grown-up girl on her back to participate in outdoor activities and festivals, which take place on the central polo ground.

Mountainous terrain makes it quite difficult to provide medical assistance to the scattered population, and distance becomes a major hindrance, not only in emergency cases. Under such circumstances intermediate solutions for problems have to be found, which requires a multi-dimensional approach to healing; thus local expertise plays an important role alongside mainstream medical knowledge.

CHAPTER 4

VILLAGE CALENDAR AND CELEBRATIONS

Getting through the year

The Wakhi calendar is determined by the seasonality of agricultural tasks and the requirements of animal husbandry. In spring people rejoice at having survived the severe winter. At the same time, however, huge tasks lie ahead. Fields and channels have to be prepared for the cultivation of life-giving crops; the livestock are at their weakest before they are brought to the remote high pastures where they are fattened during the summer. In the village, harvesting of fruits and crops coincides with the hot season. In autumn, the household is stocked with the highest amount of cereals, dried fruit, milk products, and healthy animals. The period of celebrations is then welcome, and in olden times marriages *(tui)* took place only then. Festivals and weddings are scheduled according to the availability of sufficient foodstuffs and time for celebrations and leisure. Thus each season has its preferences among the Wakhi people.

Tilling the fields and harvesting the fruits

When I was leaving the village I told my friend that I would come back in August the following year, knowing that that is the busiest month of the year. July to September is the peak season of agricultural activities—during these months every additional helping hand is welcome. My friend politely suggested that we should come in winter when there is not the same amount of work.

Both to avoid the midday heat in summer and to get everything done, agricultural work starts very early in the morning. Thus a substantial part of it is accomplished between dawn, after having attended morning prayers, and before eating a proper breakfast. We participated in most tasks and experienced the traditional division of labour. Some jobs are done by men only, such as the irrigation of fields, carrying the large bundles of wheat gleanings on their backs, shaking fruit trees, ploughing the fields, and sowing the seeds. During winter men are engaged in cutting *zax* (thornbushes), repairing walls and fences, and building roads and houses.

The women pick fruit and shoulder big heavy baskets to the store. The processing of apricots is done on the roof of the house, where they are prepared for drying. Women cut grass, make it into bundles and carry these home from far-away fields. Other tasks include weeding *(nusdun)* and picking up the gleanings of the barley and wheat harvest *(sar chupen)*. They are also responsible for cleaning the grain, and the vegetable garden is their domain. Men and women together cut and thresh the grain and do the planting and harvesting of potatoes. There are flexible rules regarding winnowing and milling grain, as well as putting fertilizer onto the fields. It is amazing to see that even women who are pregnant and due to deliver, work as much as everybody else.

Within the workforce we should not forget to mention the children: it is unbelievable how much they helped and how they seemed to enjoy it. They laughed all day long, stealing potato seeds from each other to be the fastest planter and working without extra breaks. They were often the last to come to the feast which is held for all the helpers at the end of co-operative work *(keryar)*. I could not compete with the local women. All of them would walk gracefully and upright when carrying huge loads. I would be exhausted after three or four hours of work, and would suffer from aches and pains while the other women kept busy until nightfall.

Gulmit is located at an altitude of 2,500 metres and thus belongs to the agro-ecological zone of single cropping *(ek-fasli)*. People grow barley, wheat, clover, grass, thornbushes, and potatoes, besides having vegetable gardens and fruit trees. Spring is the time of irrigation, fertilizing and ploughing fields, and

sowing grain, as well as planting potatoes and vegetables. The earliest crop to be harvested is barley, at the beginning of July. This used to be connected with a traditional festival: *chenir*. We were curious to find out about it and about the extent of its importance in the daily life of Gulmitiks. People were amused by our curiosity. Some would laugh when we greeted them with *'chenir mubarak'*, as most of the farmers do not grow barley extensively any more (in 1990, less than five per cent of the total area cropped was given to barley). Others plant it from time to time and then only as a fodder crop: one of the changes brought about by the opening up of the Hunza valley. In former times barley was the staple food of the people of Hunza, consequently most of the traditional festivals are linked to the growing cycle of this basic food crop. But nowadays, the preference is for bread and *chapatis* made of wheat; this is not only a question of fashion, but also of economy, as subsidized wheat is brought in from down-country and sold in civil supply stores. In Gulmit the crop rotation pattern has been simplified in the last two decades. Earlier on it used to be beans, followed by barley, followed by wheat; presently it is either wheat or potatoes.

One year our hosts made an effort to celebrate *chenir* with us according to traditional rules. We left the house early in the morning to go to the barley fields in Koshonuk with a tray of *chenir chapik* (big crisp *chapati*), *rugun* (butter) and *yirk*, flour from the year before, with a sickle on top. The male members of our family walked into the barley field whose ripe golden ears were shining in the early morning sun. After having prayed they put butter onto the ears of barley, sprinkled them with flour, and cut a few. These were brought on the tray back to the house where we stopped at the entrance door. Our host sprinkled the wooden door-frame with flour, and the right shoulder of each family member; the flour was also used to write the date on the upper beam of the house. Inside the house, *chenir mubarak* was said while kissing each other's hands. Most of the beams were decorated with flour dust. Some ears of the barley were then attached to the *trak* (shelf) in the open kitchen area and would remain there until next *chenir* as a good omen for a prosperous year. Finally some of the freshly-cut barley *(yirke theng)* was eaten with yoghurt, a preparation called *chenir pegashdin:* everybody has, first a spoonful of yoghurt with three grains of barley, then a

spoonful with five grains, then one with seven grains. Afterwards N.S. crumbled *chenir chapik* into the bowl and mixed it with the rest of the *pai* (yoghurt), which everybody found delicious. The male family members later went to the *jamaat khana,* the community centre and prayer house, to eat *bat* (gruel) which is prepared by the women at home and brought to the *jamaat khana;* the ladies gather in the house of friends or relatives and have their own *bat* feast. Last year our family did not grow barley, but Aslam brought some barley sheaves from his home and the *chenir* ceremony began at the door-step.

In Upper Yarkhun, in Wakhi villages above 3,000 metres, barley is still the major crop and only ripens at the end of August. When we came to the village of Kishmanja, grass and peas were being harvested but wheat, which was grown in only a few fields, was still green. In Wakhi villages in Upper Ishkoman, fields are dominated by maize, a crop grown in Gulmit only in small quantities in vegetable gardens. There some of the wheat is harvested in mid-July, while it is still green, and is used as fodder during winter-time. Both barley and wheat are pulled out by their roots by hand or with the help of a sickle. Because of the arid climate the stems do not rot in the ground and turn into valuable fertilizer. Thus the whole plant is harvested and the fertilizer production is done by the livestock.

I would join the ladies in the task of *wush druak:* cutting the grass and making bundles. These were tied on our backs with rope and together we would carry the bundles from the fields to the store, sometimes a couple of kilometers each way. After the bundles were taken to the top of the store for drying, we would count the number of bundles each of us had carried, to find out the 'winner' of the 'competition' which was part of the game. Getting rid of the husks was less enjoyable.

Working together is always cheerful and an occasion for a good gossip. Since modern technology has come to the village, neighbours and relatives do not see each other as often as in former times. There is no longer a village well where women gather; instead water-pipes lead to most of the houses. For cases of emergency and the few unconnected houses, outdoor taps have been installed. One in our garden sometimes became a meeting place for several women, when the water-line from the Gulmit spring was out of order. In former times many tasks were

time-consuming, like the grinding of grain. Neighbours supported each other by taking turns. Nowadays, there is an electric mill in Gulmit which saves a lot of time which was earlier spent supervising the grinding of the grain, but it is further away than the traditional family-owned watermill.

I observed that even when the workload is enormous, as in summer, the people are still relaxed. The work has to be managed in a certain span of time and nothing can be done out of sequence. To work faster one day and not at all the next is just impossible. There is a lot to be done, and therefore it makes sense that people know how to husband their energy.

To do something in advance is, in any case, not a custom. Cooking meals in advance is unknown to them. The Wakhi are a people famous for their bread-eating habit. Having only tea and *qamishdon,* the bread named after the iron baking tin in which it is prepared, in the morning is not filling. Accordingly, about every three hours there is a tea break, and on *keryar* additional goodies, like butter, scrambled eggs or, at lunch time, several dishes of pulses, vegetables, and rice are given to all helping hands—dishes which are normally eaten on special holidays and Friday evenings. Neighbours and relatives are thus remunerated in kind and are also sometimes allowed to take a few bundles of grass home. Road access has made it feasible to hire agricultural machines, and it is more economical to pay the tractor's rounds than to feed the large number of people and the draught animals borrowed for ploughing or threshing.

August is the month for harvesting and drying apricots, and for cutting and threshing wheat. Potato picking and grading, which takes place simultaneously, lasts until September, besides which the daily routine work of milking and grazing the cattle, feeding the poultry, cooking meals, gardening, and washing dishes and clothes continues throughout the year. In August, people pray for dry weather. The apricot crop, in particular, which is spread out on the flat roof for drying, gets completely spoilt even if it rains only for a single day. It turns black and can only be used as fodder, which is a big loss, since apricots are a source of vitamins for the family in winter. The additional income which is earned by selling dried apricots or kernels is also lost. Apricots are dried differently according to their respective qualities. Some are more or less mashed and thrown onto the

roof of the house, others are carefully opened and the halves placed on trays of willow twigs. In most cases the kernels are dried separately and different kinds are kept apart. Some apricot almonds are sweet and used for cooking, the bitter ones are utilized for cosmetic purposes: N.S., for example, would use the oil extracted from them on her hair after she had washed it. To press the oil out of the apricot almonds is a time-consuming task, usually done during the winter months. The kernels are cracked either by hand or with a stone. UNICEF provided the women's *tanzeem* with an electric nutcracking machine that can crack one kilo of the apricot stones in two minutes instead of one and a half hours it takes by hand, but that has been out of order for a long time.

So far all efforts by development projects to introduce ideal processing techniques have failed. The first attempt was made by UNICEF in 1984. A British lady expert tried to teach the local women how to protect apricots from flies by putting the home-made willow trays on newly-designed racks and covering them with gauze for hygienic and preservative reasons. In case of rain a big sheet of plastic could cover the whole arrangement. Not every household has been able to buy plastic sheets and get iron racks made, and if it rains for long the apricots have to be ventilated from time to time, otherwise they rot just the same. All this needs extra money and time, which cannot be provided by the individual household during peak season, and therefore it is still a common sight to see spots of bright orange apricots spread out on roofs and rocks. The apricot is the queen of all fruits in Hunza, growing even in arid climatic conditions and in altitudes above 3,000 metres. In some villages there are more apricot trees than inhabitants, and at least eight different varieties can be counted. When there is enough time, some women make jam out of apricots; they also make syrup from the mulberries which ripen a little bit earlier in the season. Gulmit also grows peaches, apples, pears, grapes, and walnuts. The orange berries of seabuckthorn colour the slopes but are only foraged by goats. Here in the dry, sandy ground they grow in abundance, but the people of Hunza do not have the time and energy to pick the berries, which are rich in vitamin C and would be an excellent supplement to their diet.

I still remember one night in August when N.S. and Z.B., our neighbour, who is a young widow and mother of four children,

disappeared after dinner and climbed onto the roof, where they peeled dried peas for half the night by the light of an electric bulb. Luckily there was electricity—locally called 'electric city'—that night. The electric power-house in Khaiber is not very reliable most of the time, especially during hot sunny days in summer when a lot of melted glacier water comes down the mountains. Then the turbines get switched off in order not to be destroyed by sediments in the water. Sunshine and water are normally a blessing, but in this case a curse, since in the busiest month of the year electricity is cut off for two or more weeks and often for several hours per day. People often complain, forgetting that it wasn't long ago that they used to live completely without electricity. Of course it makes a big difference to the housewife if she has to cook lunch or dinner on an open fire. It means chopping up wood and thornbushes, lighting the fire and cooking first the curry, then the *chapatis,* and afterwards tea—all this takes three times as long. Local bread, which is baked in the embers, needs a lot of attention, and the present I brought from Germany, which was most welcome, was a small electric cake tin to make what is since then called *bichli qamishdon* (electric bread). Electric goods like pressure cookers are normally purchased in China since the opening of the Khunjerab Pass. I was surprised to find even a steam-iron in a local Hunza house.

It is understandable that in former times meals consisted mainly of different kinds of gruel which are quickly cooked and thus need little energy to prepare. This is still the case in Baroghil, the Upper Yarkhun Valley being without roads and electricity. I recall seeing a woman borrowing glowing embers from a neighbour.

Potatoes—a colonial heritage brought for the first time to the region by Colonel Lockhart in 1886—are presently grown in Ghujal in great quantity, predominantly as a cash crop. The extensive cultivation of potatoes was introduced by development agencies. One year when there was a drought in the Punjab, prices for Ghujali seed potatoes rose enormously. Thus in Gulmit in the following year most of the fields were planted with potatoes—regardless of the recommendation to leave plots potato-free for two years—but alas the demand for seed potatoes from the Northern Areas was very low in the autumn of 1989. Potatoes were therefore in abundance for home consumption,

which made N.S. remark next spring, 'potatoes are one thing which we have in plenty and do not have to worry about,' and she offered us a lot of extra potato dishes. Cooking potatoes is energy-consuming but came into fashion when people started using pressure cookers. Potatoes are nowadays the staple food of Ghujali cuisine thanks to their versatility. On holidays or on visits you might be offered chips or potato pancakes—a real luxury as extra cooking oil has to be bought.

We were present in the second week of November, the first and only time in the year when an animal was slaughtered, and the meat hung in the store on top of the house *(mara)*. I still remember the shining face of N.S. when she put the winter supply of meat into that cool room. Afterwards she fried the liver and all the other offal and we had a real feast together. The meat lasted for several days, and we also partook of the whole head of the animal (which made us long for the usually meatless days!) In former times there was a festival called *thumushalin,* held at the winter solstice, when the whole village slaughtered a herd of cattle whose meat lasted during the cold season, getting deep-frozen in the store by the cool dry air. Meals in summer are mainly vegetarian, although nowadays there are a number of open-air butchers along the Karakoram Highway, and people bring meat back when they travel. An average farmer has only a few cows and some sheep and goats, which are needed for breeding purposes and milk production and are not slaughtered for meat. It is different in winter, when the daily diet of dried vegetables (spinach, cabbage, pulses, tomatoes) and dried apricots is enhanced by *gushti* (dried meat). Natural means of preservation, like using solar energy for drying and the ice-cold irrigation channels to keep food fresh in summer, are still in use everywhere and are an essential part of a very sophisticated village economy, although nowadays it is combined with modern technology.

Electricity is very important in winter when the ice-cold wind—known in Wakhan as the *bad-e-Wakhan* and also so named in Ghujal—makes life miserable. In former times the open fire in the centre of the traditional house was the sole source of energy and was only lit to cook meals, because firewood has always been a rare commodity. No wonder people would drink hot liquid butter in order to get warm, and wore woollen trousers, jackets,

and robes *(chapan)* made from homespun *pattu* cloth. Turning yak and goat hair, as well as sheep wool, into rugs and clothes by weaving and knitting used to be a typical occupation for both men and women in winter. There is not much snow in the high mountain desert villages of the Karakoram, and on a clear day it is best to be outside in the warming sun. Most of the snow falls in the high altitudes above 5,000 metres, where it feeds the enormous glaciated area from which some of the mightiest glaciers on earth originate, such as the fifty-eight-kilometre-long Batura. The coldest months are January and February and people have started to use electric heaters, not without problems, however, since the energy supply is limited. The whole system has collapsed many times, and nowadays people are not allowed to switch their heaters on during peak cooking hours, nor in the evenings until after nine o'clock. Ghulam-ud-din, always pioneering and experimenting with new introductions, was one of a few villagers who imported coal and an adequate stove from China last winter for the first time, and was quite pleased with the result, i.e., a warm house, and not only at the time when the *buxari* is used for cooking.

Everything is utilized, nothing is wasted in Hunza. As no detergent is used for washing the dishes, even that water is fed to the animals along with vegetable peelings, left-overs, potatoes, apricots, and normal fodder (hay, lucerne, clover, chaff, dried leaves). It sounds like real luxury to us when cows, goats, and sheep are fed with valuable dried apricots. But in Hunza there is quite a surplus of this fruit that cannot be marketed, not only because of transportation and marketing problems, but because there are varieties which are normally not consumed by human beings because they are too tasteless or bitter. After winter, animals are fed with dried apricots before they eat fresh grass for the first time in order to adjust their stomachs.

Once we were looking forward to a special treat, as we saw N. S. making doughballs of flour, butter, and walnuts—only to realize that they were being made for one of her cows which had borne a calf the previous night.

The shells of apricot kernels, almonds, and walnuts are used to kindle the fire. Women collect the stems of potato plants, but hardly any cow dung is used to light a fire, unlike in Xinjiang where the Tajik people use a lot of yak dung as fuel. In

Karimabad in autumn you see baskets put into irrigation channels to collect the leaves which have fallen off the trees. When china breaks it is just left outside to rot, and the same applies to old clothes. But natural products are recycled.

Summer on the high pastures

The Wakhi living at the upper reaches of the mountain valleys depend to a higher degree than their neighbours on animal husbandry, as their crop cultivation produces only limited results. Livestock not only produce valuable manure for fertilizing the fields, but the herds are mobile property, suppliers of wool and milk products, and traditional savings accounts at the same time. Although the Wakhi are expert stock breeders, meat is consumed on festive occasions only. In the absence of male family members it is impossible to slaughter any animal, as that is customarily forbidden to women. This is remarkable, since all poultry and milk production is handled by female household members. Animal husbandry requires daily routine work and has to fit into the schedule of all household members.

In our home N.S. takes care of four cows and about ten sheep and goats, as well as a few chickens. The cows have to be milked twice a day, and in summer they are taken to the meadows. *Pai* is made daily, and butter several times a month. If there is no electricity for the newly-introduced 'Pakistani' butter churner, it takes ages to produce butter in the traditional wooden churn *(sogho)*. Huge quantities of fuel are involved in making *qurut*, which is a storable edible made from dehydrated buttermilk, thus it is produced only in the high pastures. The economic importance of these areas is not negligible as there natural meadows are available which allow for the keeping of bigger herds. In Ghujal the management of the summer settlements is carried out predominantly by the women who take care of the flocks. Connected with this women's domain is a repertoire of songs. Traditionally, *bulbulik*—rhyming triplets with a refrain at the end—are sung during the migration *(kuch)* upwards and when they feel lonely in summer-time on the high pastures. The repertoire includes many love songs, as well as songs about nature, lovers' grief, soldiers, parents, etc.

I still remember the rhythmical beat of the local butter churn, a characteristic sound which you can hear when visiting one of the high pastures. In Fatmahel above the Batura glacier, at an altitude of 3,360 metres, I met Bibi Husni, Rubina, and Zohra Begum, three Wakhi women who were living in tiny huts which could hardly be distinguished from their surroundings: a stony grey but flat terrain. They had come to Fatmahel in May with some of their children, and took care of three herds, about 400 sheep, goats, and yaks. Every morning at sunrise the milking had to be done before the animals are driven to their grazing ground, which is even further away. Those women staying at home took turns in buttering *pai* made from sheep and goats' milk. After about four hours the *maska* (fresh butter) was ready, carefully packed into birch bark and put into the ground to keep it fresh. Birch-trees are found above 4,000 metres altitude; their bark is used for insulation, and in former times the flat roofs of the local houses were covered with birch bark before a layer of mud was put on top. It is often a secret where exactly the butter is buried, and a certain quantity is reserved for special occasions like weddings.

The days are spent processing milk products and preserving them; they will be taken back to the villages as a supplement for the meagre winter diet. Thus *qurut* is produced by boiling buttermilk until a crumbly sour substance is left which is formed into a macaroon shape and dried in the open on stands with high stilts *(wilina)*, out of reach of the animals. *Qurut* is added to noodle soups *(daudo)* in winter, and also given to sick persons as energy food. The milk has to boil for several hours to produce *qurut*, and the firewood has to be collected from distant places as very little of the juniper forest is left in these altitudes, deforestation being a major problem in the Karakoram. The working day in Fatmahel ends when the animals are brought back at dusk and locked up in a fold to get milked once more. The result of all this labour is meagre: eighty to ninety milking goats give five *pushoori* (125 kg) of butter each season. The Tajik people across the border in China do not use folds but dogs to watch their flocks, which are hobbled together for milking and during the night. For a visitor, the long walk to a high pasture is always rewarded: you get spoilt with fresh cream *(merik)* and buttermilk *(thigh)*, and for honoured guests a sheep or goat is

often slaughtered, which later on will be declared the victim of a rapacious wolf.

Fatmahel belongs to the high pastures of Pasu, which are located at the northern bank of the Batura glacier. This glacier has to be crossed with animals and household items, and it takes up to two days to reach Fatmahel via Yunz. Some men help with the *kuch* (migration) of flocks and shepherds between village and pasture settlement. Villages in Hunza have their own pastures, but in areas where Wakhi and Burusho live together they also share a grazing ground, as in Shamijerav. In Ghujal, women dominate the workforce in the summer settlements, a practice that is considered taboo in Central Hunza, where no woman is allowed to set foot on the high-altitude grazing grounds since women are regarded as impure under traditional beliefs. There the mountainous regions are considered to be the realm of fairies and markhor, and rules of purity have to be strictly observed.

In Hunza animals are divided into different categories of purity, the goat and its wild forms heading the list, followed by sheep, then cattle, with other, less appreciated animals at the bottom. To live in the high pastures used to be a privilege, and young men loved to spend the summer in their hilly abodes, where they would also find some time for hunting and gathering. They would poach game like ibex and Marco Polo sheep, search for rubies and other precious stones, collect herbs and wild plants, all of which they would take down as presents to their villages. In Central Hunza it is nowadays mainly the old or disabled who go to the high pastures as the younger ones are engaged in more lucrative jobs in Gilgit and down-country.

In Pasu, fifty years ago, every household used to send shepherds to the high pastures, where barley and vegetables were also grown. Today during summer not every household can spare a shepherd, so only one-fifth of the seventy Pasu households sends a female member with the flocks of the whole community, taking turns in a rotation system on village basis. As a result of the labour shortage, distant pastures are not used any more, and the nearer ones become depleted and over-utilized. The decline of alpine dairy farming is caused mainly by the migration of male family members, since women are left alone to do the harvesting and cannot leave the village. Men look for both professional jobs

and seasonal ones, such as trekking guide, cook, or porter for mountaineering expeditions in the area. Nowadays, only a small amount of the village income of Pasu is earned in the fields of agriculture and livestock breeding.

In Yashpirt (3,200 metres), where twenty huts are still intact, we met an expedition with guides from Pasu who were happy to meet their relatives. Putting up their tents for one night they celebrated the welcome change of daily routine before the porters moved on to climb mountains with their clients. After their departure the next morning the women also packed, and gathered their animals to leave for the highest pastures, Kukhel and Guchesm (3,500-3,600 metres), where they graze their herds from July until September together with Bibi Husni, Rubina, and Zohra Begum, thus making use of all available natural resources.

Pasu lost all its former grazing grounds in the village when the land close to the Hunza river was washed away by floods which also destroyed most of the old *khan* (fortified village). Consequently, the people of Pasu planted poplar trees and thornbushes and cleared fields on small pieces of land on the opposite bank, which is also used for grazing cattle. A 140-metre long suspension bridge connects Khanabad with Pasu but can only be crossed by humans. The animals are driven across the river in spring and autumn when the water level is low. The bridge is constructed of small planks which are often as much as one metre apart, and it is a daily routine for the men and women of the village to cross it to look after their fields and animals, as well as to carry heavy loads of firewood on their shoulders on their way back to the village.

In Ghujal land is scarce and there is not even enough cultivable space to grow sufficient bread cereals. Animals are only allowed to graze inside the village from October or November until the first irrigation takes place in spring. Otherwise cows, sheep, and goats have to be supervised, and you sometimes get the impression that they are treated like pets. N.S. always insisted that we take photographs of the new-born calves and lambs.

Polo on the roof of the world

A characteristic feature of many villages in the Northern Areas is a rectangular place at the foot of the fortified village, a barren

strip which was mistaken by a recent visitor for a car park. Imagine the wise foresight of the village architects a hundred or more years ago! The first jeep reached Hunza only in 1957. Imagination is indeed required to visualize the former function of the village centre in Gulmit. Today, public gatherings take place on the village polo ground *(shabaran)*.

When we were mapping and sketching the village of Gulmit soon after our arrival, people were curious about our reasons for measuring the polo ground. Ghulam-ud-din, who is always ready for a joke, told the villagers that we were descendants of the British engineer who had constructed the polo ground during colonial times, and that we were claiming this piece of land. As flat land is very expensive nowadays, some people became worried at the prospect; they sighed with relief when they realized that he was only pulling their legs.

Horse-racing, and other games where men can prove their riding skills, have a long-established tradition in Wakhi and other Central Asian societies. One of the first British travellers mentioned in *The Gilgit Mission 1885-86,* while describing the former capital Qala-i-Panja in the Wakhan, wrote,

> There are many ruined villages scattered about, and to the east of the fort are some fine turf flats—on which Ali Mardan and his men used to play polo, a game unknown to the present Governor.
>
> (Lockhart & Woodthorpe 1889: 97).

What used to be a traditional game in the Wakhan and Hunza has its origins somewhere undetected in Central Asia, where it was practised for the training of horsemen. To the warlike tribesmen who played polo with as many as a hundred players to a side, it was a miniature battle, usually played in front of royal palaces. Rules called *chaugan* were laid down in Persia in the ninth century BC. From there polo reached Arabia, Tibet, China, and Japan, and during the Middle Ages it was spread to south-western Europe by the Saracens. It was rediscovered by the British in India, where polo was introduced by the Muslim conquerors in the thirteenth century. In 1869 the first polo club in England was founded at Hurlingham. The oldest one in Germany, situated in Hamburg, dates from 1896.

The ball gives the game its name: *pulu* means willow root in the Tibetan language, but the material could also be bamboo root. International rules were borrowed from hockey and sanctioned by the 'Hurlingham Polo Association' in 1890. Two teams of four players on horseback drive a hardball (8 cm in diameter) with the help of a mallet between the goal posts of the opposing team. One player guards the goal posts, the others in the field chase the ball. Play is divided into eight units *(chukkers)* of seven and a half minutes, each followed by a three-minute break. Rules concerning the height of the specially-bred horses were dropped in 1945. In general, the horses are relatively small, nimble, obedient, and quick to react. In the Northern Areas of Pakistan they are similar in size to ponies. A very nice polo story was written by Rudyard Kipling *(The Maltese Cat)* describing the game through the eyes of a polo horse. It gives an impression of the enormous strain under which the animals fight for their masters. Normally the horses play for two *chukkers* before they are exchanged.

In the Northern Areas polo has a long tradition and is played according to local rules which are quite different. History does not reveal why polo survived in the mountain areas of Pakistan for so long. It is by far the most important game of the Northern Areas and Chitral. Everybody gets excited when the annual polo tournaments are due. There is a saying that anybody who wants to become a ruler should be an excellent polo player. In the past the local *raja, mir,* and *mehtar* were great patrons of the game—at times more than half the annual budget of their principalities would be spent on supporting the royal game. The former ruling class of the Northern Areas has become well known for skilful horsemanship. The tradition is still alive, although nowadays polo teams are sponsored by clubs and institutions. Children with home-made sticks and handles practise polo on the ground at an early age. In the past there was no limit to the number of players on each side, and no time-limit either. Whichever team scored nine goals first was the winner in all official tournaments. Nowadays, polo in Gilgit is played by two teams of six players each for two thirty minute periods with a ten-minute interval.

The polo tournaments are connected with local holidays and normally take place in spring and autumn. During British times, when Gilgit was the centre of colonial administration, the Political

Agents would almost always include a note on polo in their reports on *jalsa* meetings (the clan gatherings). All the Political Agents seem to have been very enthusiastic about equestrian sports. On the site of the present runway of Gilgit Aerodrome, they had built a race-course for horses, but modern communications have put an end to it. Herbert Todd reported,

> The annual inter-district polo tournament was fought out with the usual keenness and energy. Punial succeeded in re-capturing the first class shield from Nagar after a bare forty minute chukker. In the second class final blood became a little heated resulting in two inpatients for the hospital, but otherwise all went extremely well.
>
> (Gilgit Agency Political Diary, March 1931: 382)

The colonial officers supported efforts to establish numerous new polo grounds within the Gilgit Agency. In 1936 the first polo tournament took place on Shandur Top, at an altitude of 3,700 metres. Major Cobb, who happened to be fond of playing polo under a full moon, named the ground on the Shandur Pass 'Moony Polo Ground'. The annual polo tournaments can only take place after the last patches of snow have disappeared. Shandur is the highest polo ground in the world and one of the most beautifully situated, in a natural meadow environment surrounded by snow-clad peaks.

Hussain Wali Khan, the General Manager of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, is a founding member of the recently-established 'Polo Trust for the Northern Areas', and describes its aims as follows:

> The trust provides funds to support polo players and their families, to preserve this sport in the Northern Areas and to document its history. Consequently it was decided that literature relating to the traditional polo is collected for the retracing of its history.

The Shandur Tournament has become a regular event and has attracted the attention of successive Prime Ministers of Pakistan and foreign diplomats. A rest-house has been constructed by the Chitral Scouts, who organize the festival. The delegations of chief guests arrive in helicopters, the only convenient mode of travelling for them. For ordinary visitors it takes a little longer to reach the roof of the world. Supporters of all the teams have to

cover long distances on *kacha* roads and jeep tracks from the remote parts of Chitral and Gilgit. The active participants start even earlier, and stop at several places *en route* to enable their horses to become acclimatized. Polo teams from down-country are handicapped as horses and riders are not used to high-altitude conditions. From the outset these disadvantages reduce their chances against the professional teams from the mountains. Special rules apply to the Shandur tournament because of the height of the pass; the time played is shorter than in Gilgit, twenty minutes instead of thirty, and players are not allowed to hit the ball when it is in the air.

The polo tournament has some extra attractions for the visitor, who should set aside a week as the journey alone takes up to two days. When one finally reaches the most spectacular mountain scenery on the Shandur Pass, one is rewarded with a colourful programme. This includes a trout-fishing competition (the neighbouring streams and lakes abound with trout), other equestrian events like *Buzkashi,* and a festival of folk music and dances of the Northern Areas. Accommodation is provided in tents, and food stalls cater delicious meals.

This is the setting of the Shandur polo tournament. As a starting point the ball is thrown into the air in the middle of the field. Four players of one team fight for the ball, while a fifth defends its goal posts and the sixth waits in front of the opponent's for his chance. Every player is armed with a stick made of local willow wood, which is used not only to hit the ball but as often to hinder the enemy. No game is without injuries, especially as the local players seldom wear helmets or joint protection. On the other hand, traditional woollen caps and baggy trousers contribute to the folkloristic appearance of the game. The goalposts stand at either side of the 250 to 300 metre long, 40 metre wide field. After each goal the teams change ends. The horseman who has scored the goal gallops towards the middle with the ball in his hand and tries to hit the opponent's goal posts in one go, a skill which is rewarded with a lot of cheers. The local male spectators sit behind the stone walls which surround the polo ground. The female audience is hardly visible, usually being kept at a distance or in a special ladies' compartment, as in Gilgit, but is equally enthusiastic.

To each team belongs a group of musicians, who give the necessary support by beating *damaal* and *dadan* (kettle and cylinder drum) and playing *surnay* (double-reeded oboe), which accompanies the whole event and adds to the general excitement. The most famous musicians are invited for the Shandur tournament. A vivid account, more than a hundred years old, describes the special atmosphere which is created by the music in the background.

> The band...is an important and necessary feature at polo. The musicians occupy a place on one of the walls about the centre of the ground, and cheer both men and ponies with their music, now loud in encouragement of the hitter-off at the beginning of a game, or during the final struggle for a goal, or in recognition of the brilliant play of some local favourite: now low as the game seems to flag, or the play calls for no special applause. The band is perfectly impartial in its favours, encouraging or applauding both sides alike.
> (Lockhart & Woodthorpe 1889: 371)

Music is played when the winners dance in front of the guests, and also entertains the visitors at night.

I attended the three-day Shandur festival one year. In the afternoon of the first day two horses died of heart failure and one player suffered a fit of weakness. According to the rules, if one team looses a horse or horseman, the opposite team has to reduce its number accordingly. In the end there were only three players left on each side. On the second day, *Buzkashi,* an even wilder game, was played by two Afghan groups from Panjshir and Badakhshan. Three horsemen were hurt right at the start. *Buzkashi* is a very rough Central Asian equestrian sport in which a goat carcass is chased across the field. The players seemed to be from a different planet, wearing felt hats and long jackets, and sometimes with the upper part of the body naked. Afterwards the Chitral Scouts, in their uniforms of khaki shorts and sandals, marched in a military parade to the music of bagpipes, a colonial heritage and also a strange sight. On the first two days there was also a polo tournament for teams formed by members of the hereditary rulers' families from Laspur, Chitral, and Ghizer. On the final day all the chief guests arrived and attended another *Buzkashi* performance, military parades, and the final match, which was won by the Gilgit team. Afterwards prizes were distributed and a dinner was given by the Commissioner of Chitral.

Reminiscences of Shagul Aziz

Shagul Aziz from Gulmit twice took part in the Shandur polo tournament when he was an active player. But in his own village the traditional game belongs to the past. The last polo match in Gulmit took place in 1983. Old photographs and exciting stories recall the glorious days of polo.

It was difficult to meet Shagul Aziz, one of the famous polo players of Hunza, for he was busy with irrigating fields in Shishket and, at the same time, moving into a new house. Shagul Aziz was born in Gulmit fifty years ago. His first wife died, leaving two sons and three daughters. His second wife takes care of the elder son and his family, and one daughter, who all live with him. The marriage of the younger son is expected in the near future. He has made an astonishing career thanks to his father's decision that educating oneself was far more important than just being a professional polo player.

Shagul Aziz summed up his polo experiences with the statement, 'polo is a famous but dangerous game'. He began to play polo when he was fourteen years old, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. As a semi-professional polo player in the Public Works Department's team, he was at the same time appointed inspector on the first road to Gulmit. In 1964 he started to play polo in Gilgit on behalf of the Hunza team, and went there on horseback twice a year, in April and November. When he became famous he was asked to play for the Gilgit and Northern Scouts and was rewarded with land in Gilgit after brilliant performances. He remained a member of the police and headed their team after they formed one of their own. Since that time he has had a house in Gilgit where he keeps all his cups and photographs of his polo career. He played for the police for thirteen years and five months together with Derwesh, a famous polo player from Nager. The Mir of Hunza awarded him for his good performance with a number of his best horses and allotted him further land.

In Gulmit, the meeting point for all Ghujali teams during the Mirs' times, matches were played once a week during the polo season. Special tournaments and daily matches were arranged to entertain the Mir when he took up residence in Gulmit during the autumn hunting season. One day Shagul Aziz and other

Ghujali players went to Baltit for a match at the Mir's special request. The very close match lasted for three hours, the Baltit team succeeding in winning the cup in the end. Shagul Aziz recalls that good players scored up to twenty goals in the olden days, which was only possible in a match with no time limit. Presently, nine goals are necessary to win a match.

Shagul Aziz is renowned for one game in which he hit the ball seven times as it flew in the air, an indication of his skilful playing. Later in the same match his horse was hurt and he had to withdraw. On several occasions he himself endured a lot of injuries. Once when he was playing for the Gilgit and Northern Scouts, he fell off his horse and the opponents' horses trampled him, but he continued to play in spite of nine different wounds that he received that day. It was only in 1988, after an eye injury, that he gave up playing polo, and has since drawn a pension from the police. Six times he was presented with the 'Northern Areas Best Player Cup' by the government, an achievement which is unique so far. He was invited not only to the Shandur Pass tournament but also to Lahore.

When the mirdoms were abolished by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in 1974 the regular polo matches in Hunza and Nager were terminated . But there are still famous polo players from these areas who have joined the Gilgit departmental teams. In the Northern Areas the number of teams participating in the tournaments comes to over twenty. Shagul Aziz remembers that before people gave up breeding horses in Ghujal, the vast majority of the Hunzakuts had horses for transport, riding, and polo. After the Karakoram Highway was opened, the main reason for keeping horses faded away. Shagul Aziz stresses that it would be too much of a luxury if horses were kept solely for playing polo. In former times Gulmit maintained its polo ground as a lush green meadow, quite a contrast to the present barren place where today the youngsters of Gulmit and surrounding villages play volleyball.

Traditional festivals

Traditional festivals are closely connected with the annual agrarian calendar in a society depending solely on subsistence farming and animal husbandry. The celebration of fertility, and

purification rites, as well as harvest festivals, comprise an integral part of a way of life which is in tune with nature. The different seasons of the year structure the daily activities of the Wakhi people who live in the rural areas. As nature is not predictable, the hardworking farmers cannot rely on a steady yield of edibles. Years of starvation can alternate with excessive and rich harvests. The well-being of entire villages is thus badly affected by natural hazards and unexpectedly long and dry winters. Their sophisticated irrigation systems are fed by meltwaters from the mighty glaciers in the tributary valleys. A late coming of spring might retard the whole maturing process of crops, and a rainy summer can spoil the entire harvest. Each and everyone's life depends on nature's moods. The strength of environmental forces affects daily life and the annual cycle of agricultural activities. Festivals are a result of this awareness, and are a welcome opportunity not only to pacify the spirits, but also to interrupt daily routine work, dress up, meet friends, and have a feast together during village celebrations.

When the formerly independent principalities lost their autonomy they were gradually integrated into the administration of Pakistan. The same applies to public holidays, which are nowadays dominated by the national calendar of Pakistan. Islamic events and *Eid* days, as well as *salgirah* celebrations in honour of the Aga Khan, form the framework of festivals. On the one hand the number of festive occasions and local holidays has increased substantially, but on the other hand, knowledge of the ritual and meaning of traditional festivals is diminishing.

With modernization reaching the mountains, a growing proportion of rural people no longer depend solely on farming, but are also earning their money in non-agrarian jobs. Their lives have been directed towards modern technology and communication systems, which push the celebration of old festivals into the background. Cultivation methods have been modified, and some crops which dominated the fields in former times are seldom planted today, and in many cases have faded away. Festivals linked to the growing-cycle of barley, for example, cannot be celebrated properly anymore. But a growing awareness of the loss of local heritage can be observed. Some far-sighted villagers are trying to keep the festival tradition alive, with a few modifications to suit the present circumstances. While living in

Gulmit we were introduced to some of the old local festivals by friends who were always trying to quench our thirst for knowledge.

Kitithid—expulsion of the cold and welcome of spring

In the middle of February the end of the cold season is celebrated. At *kitithid,* the cold is symbolically driven out of the house and the warm season is announced. This is the time when the Shogunptuk clan becomes very important. There are Shogunptuk living in each and every village of Ghujal, similar to the Diramitin in Baltit. They are the privileged at ceremonies, and they take over the initiation of certain rites. The clan name is derived from the Wakhi word *ptuk,* which means 'to sprinkle something with flour'. At the beginning of *kitithid* members of the Shogunptuk collect bundles of wild sorghum and present one to every household, where it is used as a broom *(drepch).* In the early morning of the festival-day one member of each family goes to his Shogunptuk with a *qamishdon* (bread) and returns a ceremonial bit of the *drepch.* Normally it is kept on the roof of the house, close to the opening *(ricn)* which serves as a smoke-hole, and is the only ceiling window in the traditional one-room house.

On this occasion it is the duty of the head of each family to climb onto the top of the roof and clean the *ricn.* Afterwards he hands the *drepch* down to his wife, who cleans the inside of the house, starting at the fireplace. When everything has been turned upside down, the male head of the family continues the ritual by sprinkling flour on all supporting pillars of the roof—first the pillar to the right of the *dildung* (platform for cooking), then the one on the left side, next the two entrance-pillars, and finally, the opposite pillars. Afterwards, the walls are purified by flour as well. The whole ceremony is then repeated at the doors. The next step of the ritual demands the sprinkling of flour on the heads of all family members, and on their right shoulders (the left one is taboo in this context).

As a special dish at this time the women prepare *qista* (thin fermented bread) topped with milk and liquid rancid butter. This meal is eaten by all family members before the men leave

for the *jamaat khana* where they gather in the courtyard. Different dishes are brought from every house, and a proportion is eaten there with the remains being redistributed between the houses. At the end of the gathering everybody symbolically brings manure to the fields to signify that the agricultural year has started. The rest of the afternoon and part of the evening is spent playing polo.

Woth xak—cleaning of channels and preparation for cultivation

During the last week of February there is another festive day called *woth xak,* literally 'the making of an irrigation channel'. Besides constructing new ones, the existing channels have to be cleaned and repaired prior to the beginning of the new agricultural cycle. In a region depending solely on irrigated crop-raising, the proper functioning of the channel network is most important. The ceremony connected with this day starts off in the morning and, as with the *kitithid* festival, the door jambs are sprinkled with flour. After dusting himself, the man of the house purifies the spade in the same manner, then takes it either to the head of the Dalgiram *woth* or to the Silum Khan *woth* channels, (the latter is named after the Mir who was buried in Gulmit). Here he and the other villagers wait for the *khalifa* to come and celebrate the religious ceremony. In his prayers the local lay-priest asks for blessings on men and fields, prosperity, and a sufficient water supply for the coming season. Afterwards the irrigation channels are cleaned, and one member of the Shogunptuk clan distributes water among all the farmers who share in the irrigation network. In former times this ceremony was held at the mausoleum of Tham Silum Khan III, who provided Gulmit with new channels. His cultivation projects have formed the basis of the present oasis. Nowadays, the celebration has been transferred to the yard of the *jamaat khana* where all families gather and consume *bat* (gruel), the traditional dish which has been prepared at home. In former times the festive day was concluded and highlighted by polo matches.

Taghum—sowing of new crops

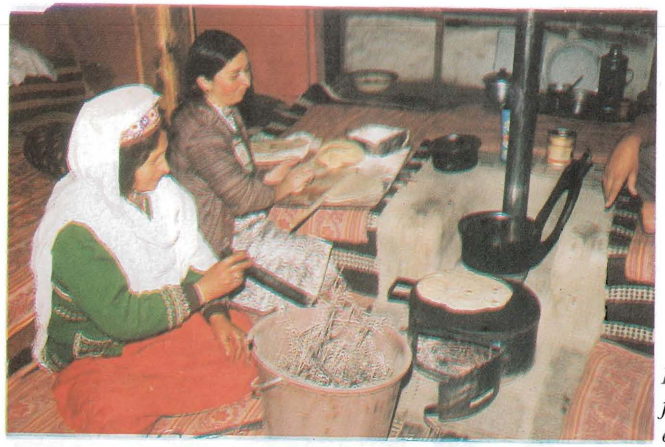
Taghum is the sowing festival which takes place during the first week of March and is celebrated on two consecutive days. On the first day, women put on newly-made clothes and leave the house in order to bring home fresh water from the irrigation channel. They use this water for the preparation of *semen chapik* flour. In this procedure, grain is soaked in water to allow it to ferment for a certain period, after which the product is spread out on the roof to dry before grinding. The processing lasts the whole day. *Semen* is used to cook a rather sweet dish which is traditionally eaten on different festive occasions.

The head of the family again sprinkles flour on the pillars and doors, on his own head and right shoulder, and on those of his family members, a procedure repeated in all traditional festivals. Being thus purified, everyone eats *semen chapik* with *rugun* (liquid rancid butter), one bowl of which is delivered to the *jamaat khana* where only the men gather. After they have prayed for successful sowing, ripening, and harvesting of all crops during this year, the community consumes a festive meal.

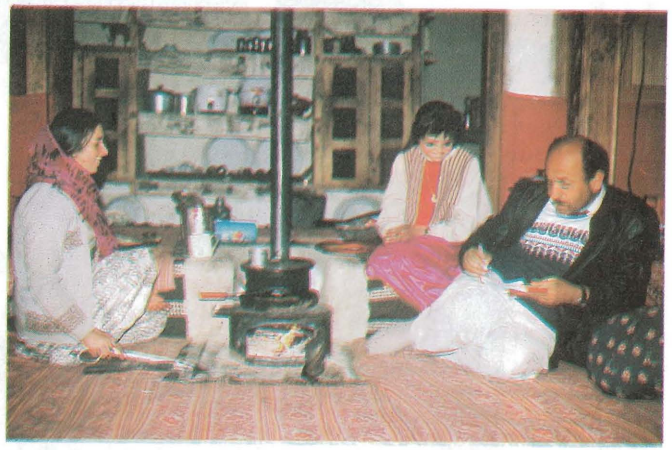
The afternoon is reserved for polo matches and dances, to the music of the famous Dom musicians from Hunza who entertain the audience with traditional melodies. In each village there are also well-known male dancers who have learnt their steps from childhood; they move very artistically to the clapping of many applauding hands. The revered village elders open the dance, and social ranking plays an important part in forming the line of dancers. Wakhi dances are famous for their long rows of dancers who soar high in the air, in a series of exalted jumps.

In the evening one member of each household takes a loaf of bread to the Shogunptuk clan. In return he is presented with a piece of *pish pish winik* wood, similar to that of a willow tree, and a minature plough called *stors*. In the meantime, the women have prepared *bat,* and before that is eaten by the whole family the *stors* gets buttered and covered with *bat*. During the *taghum* festival it remains in the *trak,* afterwards it is kept on the roof for the rest of the year.

On the second day, the men meet in the *jamaat khana* to pray and eat *semen chapik*. Then they set out for a specially-reserved field. The ceremony is executed by a member of the Shogunptuk

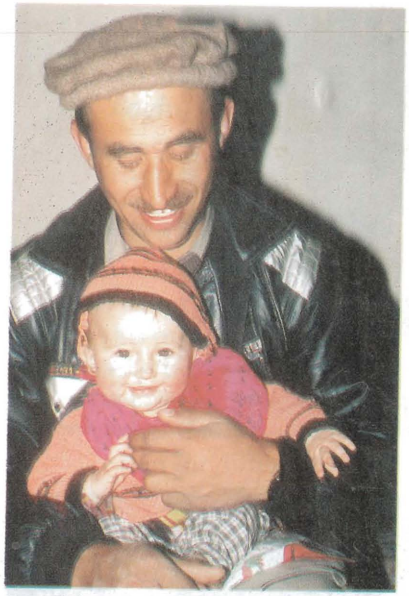


Preparation of food at the central fireplace

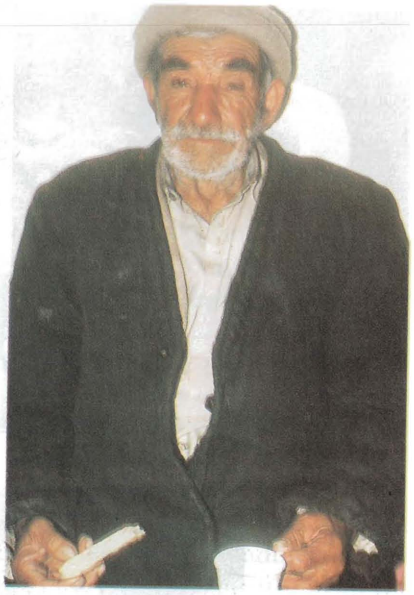


Evening at home

Apricots are dried on willow trays exposed to the sun on the roof of the house



Proud father and son

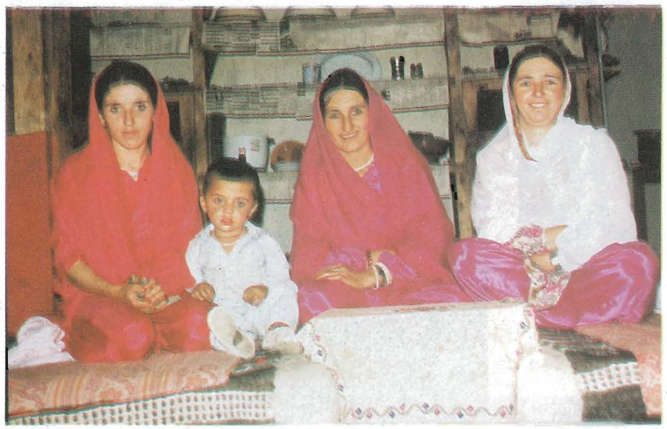


A respectable village elder

Children of a joint family

Ladies of the Women's Tanzeem

Chenir ceremony in honour of the barley harvesting season



Festive dress for Salgirah

Diamond Jubilee band performing on Salgirah

Wakhi village elders

Famous singer

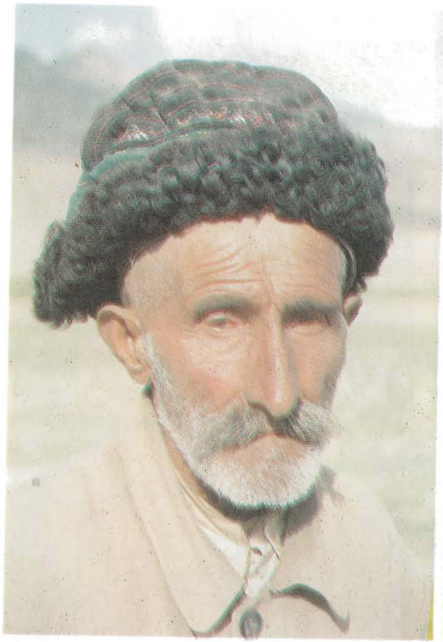
Grandmother and grandchild

Father and daughter in traditional headgear

Water-mill at Ghujal

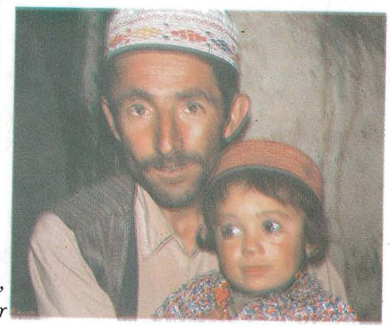
Preparation of bread

Momin's wife preparing tea

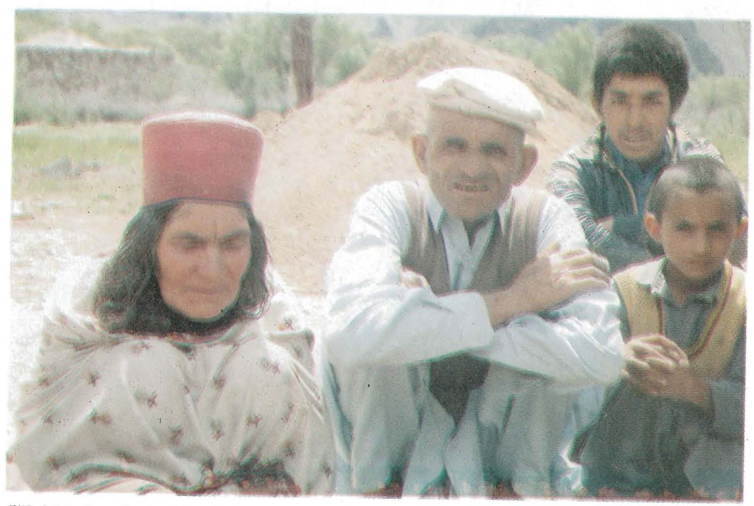


Wakhi in Darkot (Yasin Valley)

An old woman in Baroghil



Ganjuk, Momin's brother

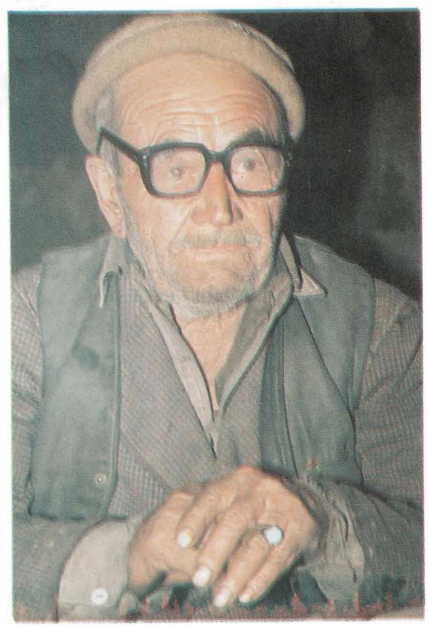


Wakhi family in Darkot (Yasin Valley)

Momin in home-made coat, boots, socks, and hat

Mr Shafi in his post-runner's uniform

Schoolboy



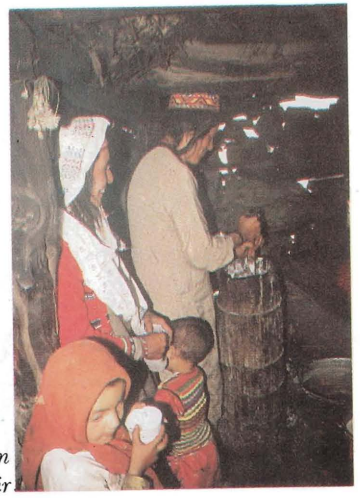
Musafir, the traveller from Wakhan

Pasu ladies crossing a bridge over the Hunza River

Rope being made of yak and goat hair

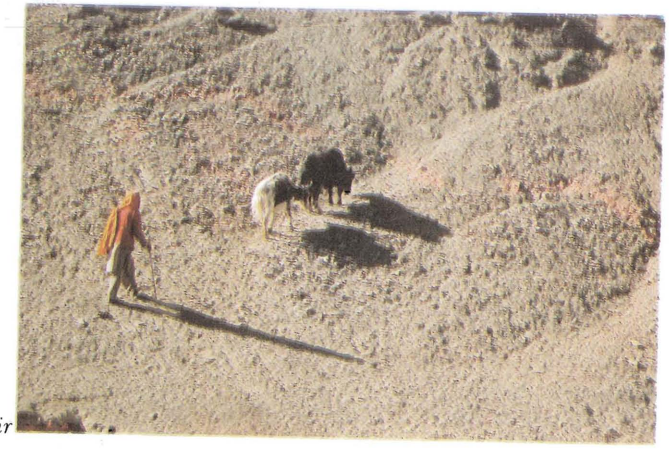
In a hut in Vedinkot (Upper Yarkhun Valley)

Patumdas, lady shepherds



At a butter churn in Mulung Kir

Boiber: summer settlement where sheep and goats are pastured



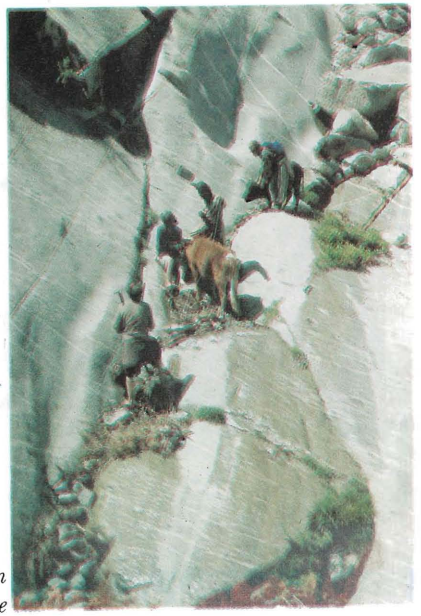
To Mulung Kir

Potato planting—work for young and old

Modern Times: threshing by machine

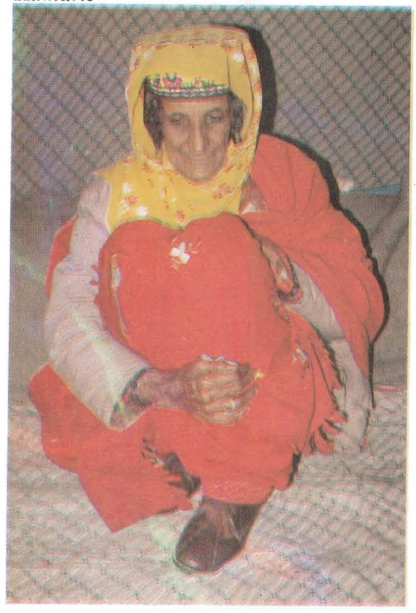
Terraced fields in the Hunza valley.

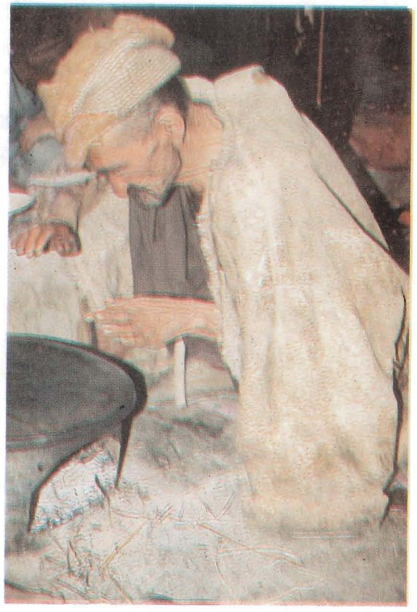
Local porters accompanying a mountaineering expedition on Pasu Glacier



Oxen being taken to summer pasture

Bibi Khand, Shaman of Kamaris

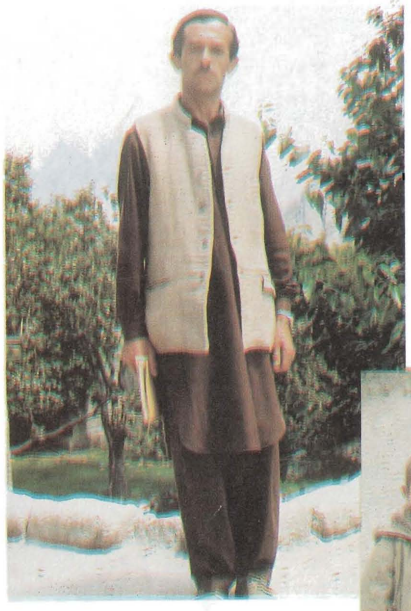




Bibi Khand's husband

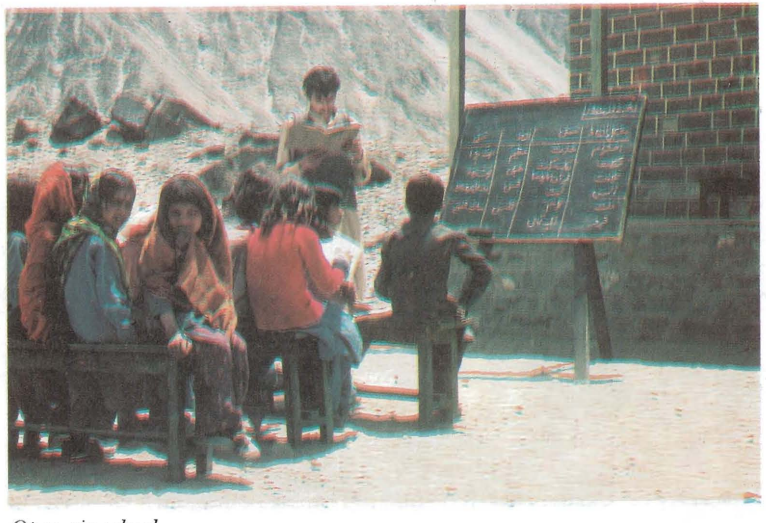
Bone-setting 'machine'...

. . . and patient



Ibadat Shah, teacher of teachers

Students proudly presenting their results

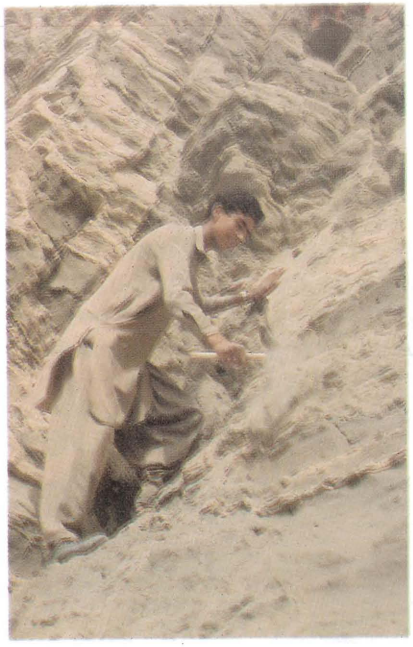


Open-air school, Kamaris

Gulmit centre

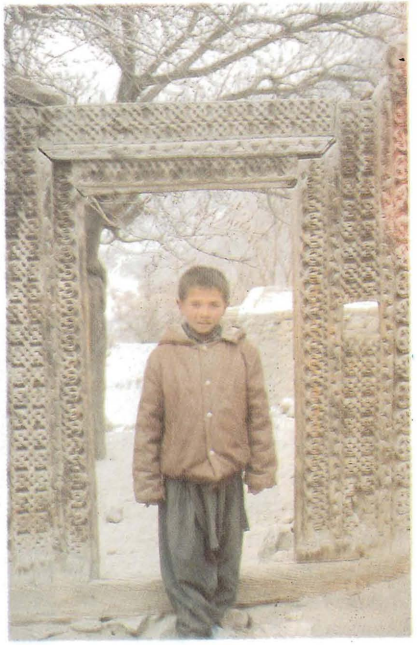
Polo tournament at the Shandur Pass

Dom musicans playing the tutek and daamal



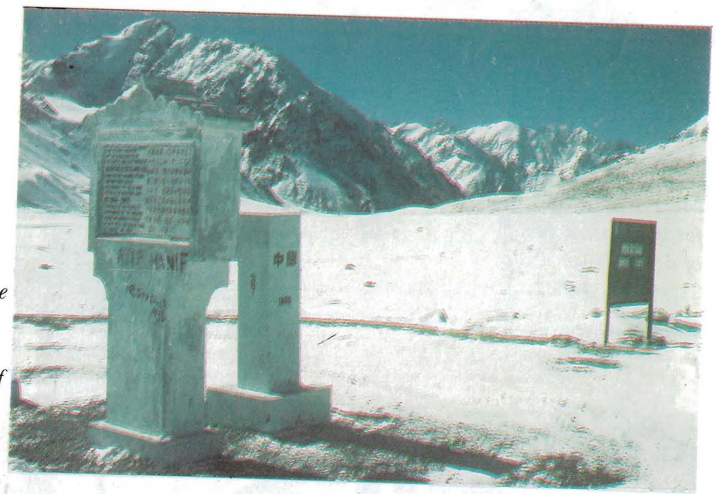
Mud is collected for the construction of a new house

Intricate doorway constructed of mud and wood

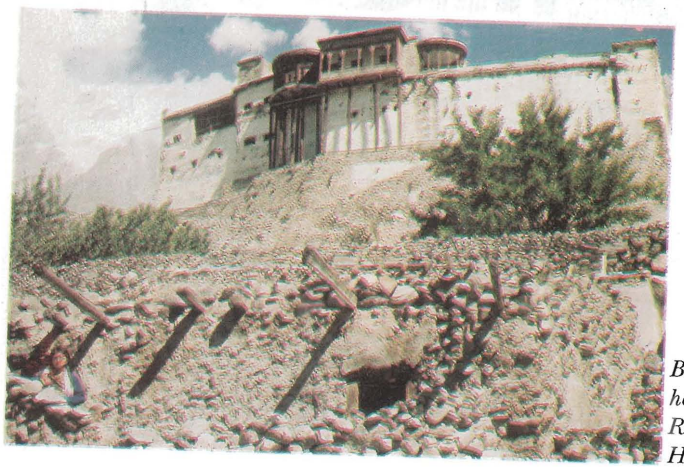


Girls Academy, Karimabad

Batura Glacier



On top of the Khunjerab Pass, where the borders of Pakistan and China meet



Baltit fort, home to the Rulers of Hunza

clan after he has prepared and purified himself by burning juniper branches in his own house. Juniper trees are regarded as holy, and have been traditionally used for consecration and purification purposes. Due to deforestation, juniper is hardly to be found nowadays, even in the higher and more remote elevations. While waiting for the Shogunptuk representative, the people note the direction in which the smoke of the ritual fire drifts. It is believed that the fields lying in that direction will be especially fertile that year, and a rich harvest can be expected. When the master of ceremonies arrives he is dressed up like a court jester and called *druksh* (ox). Thus disguised, he acts the joker to entertain the crowd, but at the same time he has to prophesy serious events. After prayers are held for a good harvest, the ceremonial ploughing takes place on his personal property. With the help of their parents, small children of about two to three years of age lead a pair of oxen to symbolically plough the field. Only those children are chosen who have never before carried out this fertility rite. Everyone does it only once in his life, and is rewarded with much applause when trying to control the oxen. Food is consumed afterwards, next to the field of the Shogunptuk. Then all families go back home to make preparations for ploughing their own fields. After a hard day's work the evening is again spent playing and watching polo, concluding the festival in the traditional manner.

Wungastoy—the marriage of birds

During the second and third week of June a lot of attention is devoted to the barley fields, as the grain is about to ripen. Barley plays an important role as it offers the first fresh grain of the year. After starvation periods during winter, this day is eagerly awaited. As birds regularly devastate the fields and crops, they are considered a menace, hard to control. On *wungastoy,* which means the marriage of birds, the farmers prepare a special form of *bat* which they offer to the birds in order to pacify them and gain their approval or friendship. With this ritual they hope to be supported in their efforts to secure the new crops. As the supply of flour from down-country has reduced the shortages of food-stuffs, the detrimental effects of birds are no longer so

important to the villagers. Nevertheless, they try their utmost to keep birds away and to secure the harvest for themselves.

Chenir—harvest of new crops

At the beginning of July, when the barley is ready for harvesting, all the men of the village proceed to their barley fields early in the morning. Each of them brings a tray of *qhamali* bread with *maska* (fresh butter) and some aromatic herbs *(spandr)* which they burn while praying in memory of the deceased and for a rich harvest. Then they put butter and flour on some of the ears before cutting the first barley, which they take home. There the whole family assembles at the doorstep. The head of the household sprinkles flour on the jambs and solemnly says, 'The new day shall greet you'. Next the freshly-harvested barley is roasted and eaten with yoghurt. On the first spoon three grains of roasted barley are mixed with yoghurt, on the second five, and finally seven. We observed that every family member would repeat this ritual before greeting each other with *'chenir mubarak'* (may this day be blessed). Afterwards people pray and eat *bat* at the *jamaat khana*. In former times the day ended with dances.

Kuchkhemak khudoi—the arrival of flocks from the high pastures in the village

At the end of September or in the first week of October, the animals return home after spending the summer months on the high pastures. This great event normally takes place on a Thursday and marks the end of the agricultural year. *Kuchkhemak khudoi* is a day of joy and celebrations. Once all the crops and fruits have been harvested the villagers have time to relax, as the winter supply has been secured. With the animals more stock for survival is arriving, in the form of preserved milk products (e.g. *rugun* and *qurut*) and living meat supply. The livestock is well-fed and at its best, after having grazed on the fertile *pamir* grazing grounds for several months. At least one animal is slaughtered and hung in the *mara* for the winter-time. On *kuchkhemak khudoi* every household prepares *qamishdon* for the *jamaat khana* congregation. The men assemble very early in the courtyard and participate in the thanksgiving service. Those people who are willing to donate a sheep or goat as *khudoi* (offering) arrange the slaughtering and preparation of the dishes. At lunch-time *bat* and meat are eaten, and the fortunate termination of a busy agricultural year is celebrated. Duties and prospects for the coming cold season are discussed by the gathering.

Winter in the village

Winter-time allows for different activities: apart from taking care of the domestic livestock, agricultural work is reduced to a minimum. Men go poaching for game, such as ibex and Marco Polo sheep, near the snowline in the glacier valleys, on the pretext of securing firewood, which they collect as well. Down by the river they search for ducks resting on their way south; special *sangar* walls offer protection, enabling the men to get within close range of the flocks of duck. Necessary repairs and the construction of houses can be considered now. Retaining walls for terraced fields are checked for their stability. Sheep wool, goat and yak hair is spun. Rugs, mats, and *pattu* are woven for domestic use. Most of the outdoor activities come to an end when the severe wind blows down the valley and restricts mobility. Visiting relatives and neighbours remains the only variation to domestic life, which is then confined to the one-room house around the central fire-place. This is the time when good story-tellers are in demand to help 'kill time' by relating wonderful stories, the latest gossip, and the histories of families, rulers, and saints.

CHAPTER 5

PUBLIC LIFE AND PROSPECTS

Education for a bright future

Like most boys of Gulmit, Aslam attends the local F.G. Boys High School; he is in his final year. To reach school the pupils have to cover great distances. Some walk for an hour every day, while others from villages further away spend up to three hours daily on the road to the newly-built school in Chamangul. But attending school is not the only duty of pupils; they also have to support their families in the afternoons. Aslam is quite happy to escape in the mornings and go to school, where the attractions include meeting friends, exchanging news, and playing volley-ball—a welcome change from household and agricultural duties. This diversion is welcome especially after the long summer holidays, when everybody has been involved in harvesting all day long with no free time.

When asked how long it takes him to get to school, Aslam lies in front of his aunt in order to lengthen the time spent on the way. He enjoys every spare minute with his friends. On the other hand, when domestic work is pressing he might miss a day of school. When help is urgently needed at home education comes second, and all teachers are aware of this fact from their own experience.

To find time for other student duties like homework is similarly difficult. Reading and writing starts only after dinner and competes with exhaustion and sleepiness. While other household members are chatting and discussing important matters, Aslam sits on the ground with his book on his knees trying to study. Sometimes his concentration is diverted when interesting stories are related. On other occasions, fading electricity supply terminates his efforts. This is not due to the well-known

phenomenon of load-shedding as in down-country, but the only turbine situated in Khaiber sometimes fails to sustain a steady supply. Then an early night puts an indiscriminate end to all study efforts.

'Learning by copying', seems to be the motto of most teachers when it comes to homework. Surprisingly, many excellent students have emerged from this system. Having been trained as a teacher myself I was interested in the schooling system in Hunza, where the general local emphasis on education is impressive. I have tried to trace the beginnings of teaching in the Karakoram, Hunza, and especially in the village of Gulmit. As we found, there is an unique awareness about education on the part of the rural community, and it is worth looking at this phenomenon from different perspectives.

The overall picture for Pakistan is that of a country with a high illiteracy rate. Just above a quarter of the population can read and write, this ability being less developed among women in rural areas. Pakistan is lagging behind other countries of similar development status, as United Nations reports confirm. Although since independence schools have been constructed in great numbers and education facilities have been spread all over the country, these efforts have not been sufficient for a broad-based public education, and the training of teachers needs further improvement. Up to now emphasis has been pre-dominantly laid on boys' education—about half of all in their age-group are enrolled in primary schools, while just above a quarter of all girls attend school.

In the remote mountain regions of the Northern Areas one would expect an even worse picture than for the whole country. This holds true for some valleys where, especially in the field of education, little progress has been made. But in Hunza we have found an exceptionally high awareness of both male and female education.

When wandering through the valley one observes that numerous schools form the centres of the villages. Both public and private schools for boys and girls are to be found, and from my enquiries and evaluation of statistical data, I came to the conclusion that nowadays nearly all children regularly attend school. On the one hand this is a result of the government's provision of buildings and teachers, on the other hand of the

creation of educational thinking due to the early and far-sighted efforts of the third Aga Khan, who half a century ago supported the first educational steps in Hunza from his privy purse.

Operating own schools in the mountains

Aga Khan III initiated the age of education in Hunza through a message he sent to the Mir of Hunza in 1946. The idea of the introduction of schools in Hunza was born during an audience given to Qudratullah Beg, emissary of Mir Muhammad Jamal Khan, in Bombay. The Aga Khan allocated funds for these institutions from the presents he had received during the celebrations and weighing ceremonies on the occasion of his diamond jubilee. His followers in the subcontinent and East Africa had collected the equivalent of his personal weight in diamonds, and the 'Diamond Jubilee Investment Trust' was created from these donations from his community and expanded by personal assets. The very large sum of one million pounds sterling was set aside for charitable projects in the fields of education and health. The Aga Khan's major concern with the upbringing of remote communities is expressed in the following letter which was sent to the Mir of Hunza on 26 January 1946:

> I have had a long discussion with your representative Qudratullah Beg in the presence of your other subjects who are in Bombay about the facilities or rather lack of them for education in your kingdom.
>
> From what they say it appears to me that some serious measures should be taken to improve educational facilities in your kingdom. I am sure you as a good ruler and good Ismaili will take to heart the matter of vital interest to your subjects and see that educational facilities are available to all your Ismaili subjects and also to Ismailis in and near Gilgit. I am sure that you will heed this advice of mine and immediately start at least two schools in such areas in your state as may be intimated to you by Qudratullah Beg with whom I have had long and earnest discussions on the matter. In these schools education should be imparted in English, Persian and Urdu. Religious education should also accompany secular education...
>
> (Qudratulllah Beg 1967: 59-62)

Prior to this initiative there were only a few literate people in Hunza: less than 300 men and only one woman belonged to this

elite group. Immediately after the return of the Mir of Hunza's emissary the first eighteen D. J. schools were opened. Slowly but steadily parents sent their sons to school, and after a long delay they permitted their daughters' participation as well. The educational organization supported the public institutions in villages where no schools were present, and emphasized equal facilities for girls. During my stay more girls were enrolled in those schools than boys, and nowadays almost all school-age children have access to the one or the other form of education.

In Hunza and Ghujal another, village-based approach has lately come into existence, aimed at improving educational standards. Private English-medium schools are run by a committee of parents. This entirely private initiative was started when parents realized that their children could not compete with urban students when trying to get admission to colleges down-country. Most of the expenses of these new schools are met with the help of private donations and the monthly fees paid for every student. Parents in Hunza nowadays have a choice of schools. Some years ago nobody expected these developments, which were only possible because some far-sighted people like Ghulam-ud-din, Ibadat Shah, and others invested their time and energy into their villages' future. They followed the guiding principle that only education would improve the living conditions of the Wakhi people and provide them with modern job opportunities other than agricultural work.

First schools in Gulmit

Having lived in Gulmit for quite a while, I recall one teacher in particular. In a review of educational efforts in Ghujal, he stands out as part of the history of early schooling attempts. I am referring to Ibadat Shah, the teacher of teachers.

Usually we met after school. He always came to our house when somebody was sick or alone, and would work in the fields with everyone else during harvesting and threshing time, when many helping hands were needed. Active people like him are involved in community work and are the forces for change in the village. His thirst for knowledge has made him a man well-informed in local and world affairs. During our discussions he

always came up with some printed material that he had somehow managed to get hold of, and he had a collection of newspaper cuttings and old photographs which became instrumental in tracing the history of education in Gulmit. Where there were gaps in the record we would enquire from other knowledgeable men of the village.

The first school in Gulmit—a D. J. Primary School for Boys—as well as five others in the bigger villages of Ghujal were founded in August 1946, the year of the Aga Khan's *firman* (message) mentioned above. Only one year later, the remote valley of Shimshal was linked to this network as well. Under the guidance of Mir Jamal Khan the first Middle School was established in Baltit, seat of the hereditary rulers and source of their wealth and influence. All the first teachers of the D. J. Primary Schools in Ghujal originated from Central Hunza.

In the beginning, only one teacher instructed between thirty and fifty students and no fees were levied. Teaching took place wherever space was available, many times in the open, weather permitting, or in the old *jamaat khana* building or old private houses. After a provisional period of ten years the teacher and students moved into a proper school building which still exists. Ibadat Shah remembers his time as a student there up to fifth class in 1955. After completing this level, higher schooling could not be received in the village. Bright pupils had to continue their studies in either Hunza or Gilgit. Those going for further education had to be mobile and would stay with relatives or in boarding houses. In Gilgit, along with the first D. J. Schools, a hostel was built for students from remote villages and today it still provides rooms to 200 boys originating from all over the Northern Areas.

The career of Ibadat Shah took a different turn. He prepared himself for the next level through home studies, while at the same time, he supported the only teacher at the expanding local school. After two years he and two other friends left home. This adventurous journey which led him down-country is still fresh in his mind. The party walked across Babusar Pass (4,173 metres) all the way to Abottabad, where his companions tried to persuade him to join the army. Refusing this proposal, Ibadat Shah made his way further down to Karachi, where he continued his studies up to matric level (tenth class) at Habibia Night College. To

earn his living he had to do odd jobs during the day, thus, after working in a cigarette company, he studied at night.

After his return to Gulmit, Ibadat Shah resumed his community service and in 1965 became the first teacher from Ghujal at the Boys Primary School. In the meantime, this institution had been transformed from a private into a public school, and he was employed as a government teacher. Salaries were allocated through Tham Jamal Khan, the last Mir of Hunza. When Ibadat Shah took over in Gulmit the register featured sixty to seventy students. On a photograph from 1969 I have counted eighty students standing in front of the first school building together with their teachers Ibadat Shah and Ali Panah. Since that time the enrolment has steadily increased, as more teachers were appointed and different classes established. A new government building was opened in 1972 and the school was upgraded to Middle School, thus making room for the Girls D. J. Primary School which had come into existence in 1969.

Ibadat Shah and his students had to move a second time in February 1990, when the new F. G. High School building for boys was completed in Chamangul: a long-term project far away from the main habitations of Gulmit. To reduce commuting for the youngest students, a branch school operates within the village. Presently, there are around seventy male students in Gulmit and 250 in Chamangul, taught by eighteen teachers. The headmaster is a local person from Gulmit who received a Master's degree in education. On average, each and every household sends at least one student to this high school, and fifteen students are in the final year. The students' fees, which are called 'funds' nowadays, are more or less a token: one rupee monthly at primary level and three to five rupees from sixth class onwards for sciences, the library, and games.

Ibadat Shah used to teach all subjects when he was the only teacher at the primary school; today he teaches Urdu, Arabic, social studies, Islamiat, and Pakistan Studies. For the past sixteen years he has devoted most of his spare time to community work, and recalls his tenure as secretary of the Local Council and later on as its president. On one of his missions he made the three-day walk with other council members to remote Shimshal to open a council office there, an outstanding event in 1975 which he still remembers; later on he became a member of the Regional

Council. During all that time he was also financial officer for the Aga Khan Education Board when Ghulam-ud-din was its chairman.

Besides formal education in the mornings, additional instructions take place within the community. Attendance at religious school in the afternoons is compulsory for pupils up to tenth class; pre-school children go there for one hour daily, older ones go for two hours and have to pass an annual examination in addition to their high school tests.

But teachers have to continue their education as well. Ibadat Shah followed up his own training, took his bachelor's degree from Allama Iqbal Open University in Islamabad, and is preparing himself for a higher-level pedagogical degree. Higher qualification is also reflected in a better salary. His income increased from Rs 10 per month paid by the Mir in 1957 to Rs 110 in 1965. Nowadays a teacher of matric students earns about Rs 2000 in the government service. Besides teaching and studying privately, Ibadat Shah takes care of a large family which is engaged in farming as well. The joint family is composed of three generations: his parents have two married sons living with them in their house in Dalgiram. The wives and six children share the resources and work for the well-being of the common household. The same applies in the field of education. The eldest son of Ibadat Shah—he has two daughters and four sons—has passed matric and wishes to become a medical doctor. He can be sure of all his father's support.

As the second matriculate in Gulmit, Ibadat Shah himself was a pioneer and has experienced the dramatic change in educational facilities during his life. Because of his involvement in education he has led many students to matriculation, of whom many have become teachers themselves. That is why he is called 'the teacher of teachers'.

Modernization through female education

In a recently-published survey UNICEF has stated that in many countries of the southern hemisphere, such as Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, one million girls have limited life expectancy because of their gender. Less than two per cent of Pakistani girls

learn to read or write, and those living in the rural areas have fewer opportunities. Pakistan is a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation. SAARC has proclaimed the last decade of the century as the Decade of the Girl in order to draw public attention towards gender discrimination.

Contrary to the overall grim picture, I have experienced encouraging developments in northern Pakistan. Most striking is the fact that there is a school system which has the country's largest percentage of female students. In the Hindu Kush and Karakoram there are nowadays 125 D. J. schools with 14,000 students, of which 9,000 are female. This high rate of 64% girls is a result of the exceptional emphasis on female education reflected in this quotation:

> If a man had two children, one a boy and the other a girl, and if he could only afford to give education to one, I would say that he must give preference to the girl.
>
> (Karim al-Husseini, Aga Khan IV)

All parents in Gulmit follow this principle, which is endorsed by the community elders. Even in a family with eight daughters, everyone has been given the chance to attend school. Y.A. is the eldest daughter of this family and one of the privileged female college students from Ghujal. Encouraged and supported by her parents, she has devoted all her young life to education.

Talking about her childhood and outstanding events in her life, Y.A. remembers that she had to take care of her sisters, although additional work in the household was not required from her as this was the duty of other females in the joint family system. Altogether they were twenty-two family members sharing a traditional one-room house. The family included her grandparents, parents, sisters, one uncle, his wife and children, and one aunt. Y.A. learnt a lot from the example of her aunt B.A., who was among the first female matric students in 1979 and nowadays is a teacher herself. Within this big household there was still room for a pupil from Shimshal who was their guest for eight years. Boarding is often the only chance for children from remote places to be able to go to a middle or high school. The increasing family split up some years ago and households were separated; nevertheless, the family members have been supporting each other as much as before, especially since Y.A.'s uncle died four years ago, leaving a wife and four children.

In her childhood Y.A., like every other child, helped with minor tasks in the fields, but there was also time for games like football. Even as a child she had been to Gilgit Town, in contrast to many other youngsters of Gulmit. Her tutoring started when she was four years old. Entering school at this age meant being admitted in a kind of kindergarten. She recalls that in her early years as a pupil they had no proper classroom; except in winter, they would have classes in the open, with all students sitting on the ground. In the cold season all pupils were asked to bring a piece of firewood from their homes to feed the *buxari* daily. Fida Ali taught about forty girls in his own house without being able to provide any blackboard, charts, desks, or chairs. An Urdu book was his only medium for teaching. Nevertheless, all students were instructed in Urdu, science, social studies, and Islamiat. The facilities have since improved, proper classrooms and teaching aids having been provided by the government and private institutions.

Y.A. continued her education in the local middle school. In her day this was a provisional arrangement, but nowadays the set-up has developed into a full-fledged two-tier school system with a female principal. The teaching staff of six instructs seventy-one students in the middle school, and in addition 129 girls are taught at the Girls Primary School. All the staff come from local households.

After Y.A. had achieved her middle school degree she went to Gilgit for further education at the Girls High School No. 1. Since her father was teaching in Gilgit at the same time, this transfer did not create any problems of boarding as she stayed with him. Although education was her first priority, she managed their domestic affairs alone and seems to have been a very independent and responsible person at an early age. After the opening of the women's academy in 1986, she got the opportunity to complete her high school education in Karimabad. The establishment of a women's academy (classes six to ten) was a milestone in the history of female education in Hunza. There is a hostel situated on the academy campus which provides accommodation for 200 female students from different valleys of the Hindu Kush and Karakoram. Every day you see students in academy uniform from Karimabad and surrounding villages on their way to a magnificient and unique institution. Designed as an earthquake-

proof building by the French architect Didier Lefort, the complex combines modern techniques with traditional patterns and local materials. Selected teachers from all over Pakistan, a high-standard curriculum, and sophisticated equipment, as well as modern facilities for the boarders, attract the best students from the region. The number of students has since increased to 350.

When Y.A. attended the academy as one of eight students from Gulmit she had to pay a schooling fee of Rs 75 monthly and Rs 350 for boarding. The girls' mobility was restricted to the academy premises. The school offered interesting programmes, and from time to time they would go out for picnics and excursions. No other school in the Northern Areas offers such a range of tutelage, supervision, and special entertainment. Parents were allowed to visit their daughters every Friday. Y.A. used to see her parents once a month.

Her family has been supporting female education from the start and spends every *paisa* on the higher education of their daughters. Years ago, when I went to her home for the first time, I was surprised to see a bookcase in a local *xun*. Normally in all traditional houses you sit only on the ground, but when Y.A. is at home a desk and chair are made available.

Y.A.'s mother, who never got the chance to attend a proper school herself, has had an amazing career. She was taught first of all by her grandfather in Pasu, her native village, and, after her marriage, by her husband in Gulmit, whose home she joined at the age of sixteen. B.N. was studying and at the same time honorarily teaching for several years at the girls' primary school. She passed all her examinations as an external student and got an official appointment as the first and only local lady teacher at the F.G. Girls Primary School. Today B.N. is about forty, and besides being a teacher is also is a mother of nine children, counting only the living ones. After each delivery she goes back to school as soon as possible, which is made easy in a society where children are taken for granted. Thus many mothers take their children to work if their household does not allow them to leave them behind.

Y.A.'s father is a highly-educated man as well. As a child he had better chances to receive formal education, being a boy. But he had to go a long way from Gulmit, where he attended the D. J. Boys Primary School, to Karimabad for his middle school education, and finally to Gilgit where he passed his matriculation in 1968. He

became one of the first local teachers at the D. J. Primary School for Boys which he joined the same year, and where he later on taught in the middle school section when it was upgraded. Since 1980 he has been a member of the high school teaching staff. In the meantime he passed several examinations studying privately, and attended courses in his last semester for attaining a 'Bachelor of Education' degree. This mentor of education is himself the eldest of nine children, his parents are still alive and holding important positions in the community. Y. A.'s family background explains why all daughters get a chance for higher education even if a lot of difficulties are involved.

Living far away from the university towns of Pakistan, an enormous effort is required, especially to organize seats in down-country colleges. The official quota system for students from the Northern Areas does not guarantee a place for everyone who is interested in higher education. To meet the expenses is another big problem. When I was looking for an interpreter and Wakhi teacher I had twenty-one-year-old Y.A. in mind. I faced problems trying to find someone before the summer vacation started, specially because all the female English speakers leave Gulmit to study or work. When I finally got hold of Y.A. I was relieved, since she promised to come daily after teaching. She is one of eight female students from Gulmit who are studying in Islamabad. Most of them do voluntary teaching at home during their holidays.

After middle school there is no further 'official' education for girls in Gulmit, but the village representatives have found a solution. They have arranged a coaching system for classes nine and ten in the building of the primary-cum-middle school. It was first started in 1987 by the Allama Iqbal Open University programme and continued by the Aga Khan Education Services. Most of the teachers do this job in addition to their ordinary teaching job. Classes take place in the afternoons for two to three hours when there are no holidays. During vacation time female college students volunteer to teach their favourite subjects. As the school building is vacant, classes are held in the mornings.

When I asked Y.A. to teach me the Wakhi language I failed to realize that she had, in effect, left Gulmit eight years previously, and had little opportunity in Islamabad to converse in her mother tongue. Sometimes she had to ask others for the right expression

in Wakhi, or for a grammatical explanation I wanted to know. All these students being trained down-country can use their mother-tongue only while at home and they have to use different languages in Gilgit, Islamabad, or Karachi. Even in Gulmit, when a young student learns to read and write, his or her own language is not taught as the media for educational purposes are either Urdu or English. In order to enhance the status of their own language the Wakhi Culture Association is circulating the Wakhi alphabet, and is planning to introduce Wakhi into the schooling system.

More different languages awaited Y.A. when she went to Islamabad for intermediate studies (FA/FSc). There are girls staying with her in the hostel from all over Pakistan and even China. Four to five girls share a room, the number being reduced to two in the higher classes. She went to Islamabad at the age of nineteen, together with the other female matric students from Gulmit, but she is the only female student in science—her marks were high enough to enable her to study in this field.

In Islamabad Y.A. does not have a lot of spare time, but if she wishes to leave the hostel she can only go with her guardian, a maternal uncle who is a Ph.D. student and has his own flat in Islamabad. He takes care of some of his female relatives in Islamabad and is responsible for their well-being outside the hostel. On Thursday afternoons and Fridays, visitors are allowed to meet the students. During the short winter break of ten days Y.A. does not return home as it is too costly and also too cold in Ghujal. She enjoys herself in Islamabad, anyhow, with the hostel life where she has a lot of friends.

The personal future of all female students is linked with their academic career. Most of them reach marriageable age before finishing their higher education. Education is traditionally viewed as diminishing a girl's chances of marriage, as she would not be the same asset to a rural household as an uneducated girl who would manage the household and farm. The ambitions of a trained person for non-agrarian jobs create a workforce problem for the rural household. But nowadays, as the first educated women have proved that they can earn more in their professions than in agricultural work, their value as potential brides has changed. A growing number of matches between educated partners has created a new kind of relationship and family

structure in Wakhi society. In the case of Y.A., it could happen that she and her future husband would finish their scientific training down-country and settle there. Some of her fellow students might return home and sustain the efforts in the field of female education, while others will find attractive jobs in development projects in the Northern Areas, where their combination of local knowledge and higher training is very useful.

Ghujal's youth today

Prior to the female students of Ghujal, an earlier wave of male migrants left the mountain areas seeking new opportunities and entering educational institutions. Every year after the conclusion of the summer vacation, the young students leave their villages and travel down-country by bus and train to reach the different university towns of Pakistan. Most of them proceed to Karachi, the industrial and trading centre of Pakistan. Here they can pursue their aims by combining education with jobs—a necessary precondition for earning the funds to be able to continue their studies. The first Wakhi students arrived in Karachi as early as the 1950s, but it was only after 1968 that the number increased dramatically, to such a degree that nowadays more than 500 students from Ghujal work and live in Karachi, where they have formed their own migrant organizations. The older students support the new arrivals with their advice, and share the difficult experiences of a new start for a rural person in a metropolis like Karachi. Nowadays, the newcomers stay with relatives or neighbours, and many students share a flat to minimize cost and the time spent on domestic work. These small communities, based on friendship and kinship, are very well organized. Each group appoints one of its members as manager, who delegates the duties of housekeeping, shopping, and food preparation. Everybody has to participate in a monthly turn of duties.

Nevertheless, following the path of education is quite challenging. Most of the students have to work by night and study during the day, or vice versa. The jobs are mainly restricted to the service sector and light industries. Working a full shift does hamper studies. The time left after working hours is hardly

sufficient to study, rest, sleep, and keep up social activities. Hence it is very difficult to attend laboratories, libraries, seminars, lectures, or workshops, or to work on any project assignment. Preparation work has to be minimized, and very often exhausted and fatigued students fill the classrooms. Surprisingly, a fair share of them manage quite well with their studies and become engineers, medical doctors, educationists, etc. Some specialists would not be able to find a proper position in the Northern Areas; once these have established themselves in Karachi as professionals, they join the small group of people who have called their families to join them in the metropolis, while some find themselves a marriage partner from the south. Mostly, students keep strong contacts with their villages and see their brief stay down-country as a necessary step for improving living conditions back in the mountains, where they would prefer to work as professionals. An innovative system for improving standards is the tutoring of bright students in their villages when they return home during summer holidays, thus preparing them for the different teaching methods and curricula of the colleges and universities. For the next generation of students the conditions should be more favourable, as a lot of experience has been gained and transferred between the lowlands and highlands, between city and village. A number of examples of successful, educated migrants has increased the awareness for overall education, and Ghujal's youth is very enterprising and innovative in this respect.

CHAPTER 6

WAKHI POETRY

There exists a unique form of Wakhi poetry which has been preserved in phonetic script by A. L. Grünberg and I. M. Stéblin-Kamensky, two scholars of the Russian Academy of Science who collected Wakhi oral literature in the 1960s. All these examples have been taken from their collections and translated into English. Their achievement goes far beyond the earlier collections of D. L. R. Lorimer, who was mainly interested in the composition of a Wakhi dictionary, but who has conserved a corpus of Wakhi poetry almost forgotten among the younger generation. Nevertheless, interest in the traditional literature has increased lately thanks to the establishment of a cultural association which provides a platform for the presentation of locally-created poetry and compositions.

In Wakhi oral literature, *bulbulik* (the voice of the nightingale) is a well-known form of folklore which does not exist in other parts of the Pamir. Grünberg and Stéblin-Kamensky emphasize the strict disctinction between male and female genres of poetry. The recitation of wedding songs, lyrical and religious songs, as well as story-telling, belong to the traditional heritage and occupation of men. Exceptional singers and story-tellers have acquired a reputation all over the Wakhan. Recently a Wakhi singer from Ghujal represented his colleagues in a show on Pakistan television, as well as in the annual *mela* of Lok Virsa (Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage). His songs in Persian and Wakhi are held in high esteem by the Wakhi neighbours in China as well.

Bulbulik, in contrast, represents a purely female form of Wakhi poetry. The experiences during the summer season on the high pastures provide the background to emotional expressions. Women who have participated in the annual *kuch* are the

composers and singers. The *bulbulik* is constructed as a triplet with an outer rhyme, concluding with an additional refrain repeating the line: 'I am going to sing you a *bulbulik*'. The female shepherds sing the *bulbulik* on different occasions; for instance, when they leave the village and their family members for the high pastures, the women express their feelings of separation and longing in these songs. While staying for a prolonged period in a remote shepherds' settlement a woman will sometimes approach exposed cliffs from where she can overlook the valley. Closing her ears with her fingers, an attitude called *fetek* (lamentations), she expresses her loneliness, singing of love, friends, family, nature, departure, and death. *Bulbulik* are mostly of an emotional and sad nature. The meaning is very often disguised in euphemisms and is unintelligible to outsiders. But for the women of the pastures it is clear who is being talked about and what the singer wants to express. Some examples are presented here:

There is a horseman on the opposite bank.
I have found someone who resembles you
and your heart is also set at rest.

From the high pass.
Your appearance is nice,
I like your appearance, son of the mir.

The wind is blowing softly on the mountain slope.
Do not sigh that much,
loud moaning is a sign of grief.

Your small beads are made of hailstones.
The one who is descending to the village
shall tell my mother that her daughter is feeling bored.

Small beads: that is the hail.
Wait a little bit,
Your sister is complaining to you.

You are wearing boots.
By the way, where is my soldier?
My soldier is in Moscow.

Bind your turban.
Mount your horse,
that makes you look urbane.

You are wearing an embroidered cap on your head.
What shall I see of you?
That is my luck and my destiny.

A yellow tent.
The soldiers have left.
My soldier is also leading the life of a nomad.

A poplar tree is standing in front of your door.
I was very young.
Thinking of you I am turning old.

Your cattle are grazing on a slope.
Oh, if you were a piece of sugar
I would put you into my mouth.

There is yellow embroidery on cotton cloth.
The sun is rising.
When the sun has been rising my brother will leave.

There is gold on the steppe.
Oh, if I were a small bird
I would set out to look for you.

A cloudless time.
Oh, when I am well educated
I will embrace your soul.

Snow crystals similar to eyelashes.
I am going to make an amulet for you.
As an amulet I will give you two pearls.

I have climbed onto a cliff.
While looking down
I have a feeling of being very high up.

The apples are ripe in the garden.
When I wander about in the garden
Autumn will have reached the mountains and plain.

The river has risen with high water.
The swimmers have arrived.
Well, what will bring my warrior to me?

On the roof of your house the conifer branches are drying.
Talk in a low voice,
the small ones are sleeping.

The tree's shadow above your hut.
I am transforming you into an amulet.
I am wrapping you up in a piece of paper.

The moonlight is reflected on the floor.
Every time I think of you
I become black as coal while yearning for you.

A cup full of fresh liquid cream.
Regarding death, you are dead
and your sister is singing a 'bulbulik' for you.

You have an excellent gun.
The voice of my son is reaching me.
Your mother is loving you as well.

The sweet sun is setting in this lonely area.
The horseman has arrived
carrying a gun in his shoulder strap.

A glittering moon.
The stones and trees are melting away.
My son shall be honoured.

A flower, a flower of basil.
Regarding departure, you have left me
and I am going to suffer until your return.

A bundle of small roots.
I have struggled to achieve everything
except kind parents.

I am holding two daisies in my hands.
Do not come without anything,
it is embarrassing to come with empty hands.

Your whip has a nice handle.
People call you the unfaithful.
You have left me, go away!

The knife has a round handle.
I am giving up.
I am giving up, brother, call me.

The stars are glittering.
My brother has left.
My brother: are you hungry, are you thirsty?

A colourful bag.
His heart is at ease,
but for me separation is worse than death.

A big ring.
My eyes are looking at the door.
While watching the door my soul has left me.

A freckle like a flower.
Regarding departure, you have left
but do not forget my first name.

Give up your opium.
This day will be a lucky one,
My small eyes see my parents come.

I am wearing yellow flowers around my neck.
This is a great day.
I am returning to my village.

Yellow cloth.
Only a nice 'bulbulik' is sung.
bad ones do not exist.

Quatrains

Besides *bulbulik* there are a number of quatrains with alternate rhymes. The three examples given are concerned with the relationship of family members, a topic which plays an important role in everyday life. In close-knit communities everyone depends on each other and decisions are often made by the whole clan. Thus there is not much room for the privacy of an individual person. Children have to learn from an early age to be responsible for other members of the joint family. A strict hierarchy of importance and decision-making has to be followed. The authority of the male and female heads of the house has an inward and outward quality. In the home, they have to provide stability and are responsible for the well-being of each member. Internal harmony is the measure of the family's reputation in the community. Family and home are two very important institutions in Wakhi society.

When there is harmony at home
that is a sign of wealth, of wealth.
When there exist discord and disputes
nothing but misery and misery prevail.

When the apricot is about to ripen
give her time, give her time.
When your children are leaving you
let them go, let them go.

One should enjoy life
while being in this world, in this world.
After death you can try as hard as you like
but everything is in vain, is in vain.

Lullabies

Lullabies are composed of monorhymes. These often improvised feats of poetry are the result of certain happenings and special events. The stories of all these poetic expressions are linked to parental love and separation of families. As a rule, small children are well looked after by their sisters, brothers, and grandparents. Through their early years they are confined to a cradle *(gewora)* made of wood. The cradle occupies a prominent place on the sleeping platform, enabling the mother to nurse the baby while sitting next to it. One seldom hears babies cry, as in a joint family system there is always someone around, sometimes singing a lullaby recalling the experiences of the children of the village.

A small bird, a small bird is sitting on a stone.
You are going to see a marmot, bend.
You are going to see an itinerant dervish, burst!
Bow, bow, go to sleep.
Wait grandmother, I am warming myself up a little bit.

My son is at a remote river.
My son is the rushing of a mountain stream.
My son is the murmur of the Aryk.
My son is the heavenly rain.
My son is the mountain eagle.
My son is the wine from the garden.

My son is in Kokand.
In Kokand he has children.
He does not miss the Wakhan.

My son is in Beijing.
He has travelled through China and adjacent countries.
He has bullion in his saddle.

Proverbs and sayings

In Wakhan there are proverbs, sayings, and riddles in Wakhi as well as in the Tajik language. Narrations, which are a typical Wakhi genre, are also told in both languages. According to Grünberg and Stéblin-Kamensky, the same story can be told either in Wakhi or in Tajik, except that any inserted stanzas are only in Tajik; other ethnic groups in Badakhshan whose language is normally not Tajik do the same. Some examples of Wakhi origin are given here to show the range of oral literature in a society devoid of a written one. Wakhi proverbs and riddles betray the good sense of humour which I have experienced with our friends while living in Ghujal.

Proverbs

May God grant that I do not have a greedy partner.

The person who falls off a horse breaks one rib,
who falls off a donkey breaks seven ribs.

You can live without animals
but not without parents.

He promises a chiffon; he only talks about it to have something to say, without actually presenting it (remark about a stingy person).

His head looks like a weaver's shuttle, his back like that of a carthorse (remark about a man who has a small head and a big bottom).

A small child knows how to disappear but not how to return.

Stretch your legs according to the length of the blanket.

It is easier to bring up a calf than a child.

When you get married do not forget your parents.

The old man says, 'I am going to die', the young one, 'I am going to leave' (remark about the ties of the older generation with its homeland).

Dry earth does not stick to the wall.

Those who have clothes and those without are sharing the cold.

Riddles

(Examples taken from Grünberg and Stéblin-Kamensky)

Question : What is a white cloud beneath a tree?
Answer : A hare.

Question : What is big-bellied during the night, useless during the day?
Answer : A feather-bed.

Question : During the day it has its mouth shut, at night it is open—What is it?
Answer : A boot.

Question : What clothes the whole world but is itself naked?
Answer : The needle.

Question : What is it you can touch but do not see?
Answer : Your ear.

Poem on Ghujal

(A song composed by Headmaster Ali Kurban, Pasu)

Come on! Come on!
Let us walk with the people of the modern world
to be in tune with the time.
Write it down with your own pen.
We are the youngsters of Ghujal land

and we are the protectors of the pens and books of Ghujal.
Ghujal is our heart and our body and our everything.
Ghujal is our identity and prestige.
And the mountains and rivers and our land
are wonderful for people from outside.
Ghujal is our prestige and our image.
If people say there is heaven: Ghujal is the place.
Youngsters of Ghujal, advance, go forward,
and strive for development with speed.
Aim for your education,
your goal and faith should only be Ghujal.
Ghujal region spreads from Goshben to Khunjerab,
from pebbles to the high mountains.
We will protect our area because Ghujal is like a big well.
The animosity and cruelty has come to an end
in Hunza-Ghujal because it is the place of sunrise.
Ghujal is our prestige and Ghujal is our life.
We are proud of Ghujal.
Youngsters should move forward in the same direction
because Ghujal is our heart and our voice and our pride.
It is known everywhere as the roof of the world
because it is the abode of eagle and falcon.

GLOSSARY

The majority of terms listed in the glossary are used by the Wakhi in daily life. A number of terms are borrowed from neighbouring or court and religious languages, such as Arabic (A), Burushaski (B), Domaaki (D), Gujarati (G), Khowar (Kh), Kirghiz (K), Persian (P), Shina (S) and Urdu (U); these are marked in brackets.

Diacritical marks have been suppressed, and a simplified but unequivocal form of writing has been adopted, omitting indications of length and stress on vowels. Pronunciation follows English usage with a few exceptions: x, kh to be pronounced as in Loch Ness; z as in leisure; u as in bush; a as in arm; i as the y in city.

arbab	village elder, headman
bad-e-Wakhan	an infamous strong wind in Wakhan (P)
bat	a gruel made of water, flour, and salt
bilas	female demon (B)
bitan	soothsayer, local healer, shaman (B, Sh)
bulbulik	the voice of the nightingale
buxari	locally-constructed iron stove replacing the traditional open fire-place
buzurg	holy man, itinerant preacher (P)
chand raat	the night of the new moon (G)
chapan	a traditional long-sleeved Central Asian coat worn in winter as protection against the strong wind; a specially-embroidered one is presented to the bridegroom on his wedding day (K)
chapati	unleavened bread (U)
chenir	harvest festival (traditionally according to the

growing cycle of barley), celebrated on flexible dates according to the location and elevation of villages

chenir chapik big crisp *chapati*

chenir pegashdin food specially prepared during the harvesting ceremony composed of freshly-harvested grains and milk products

dadan big drum (B, S, D)

daf tambourine (S)

daamal kettle-drum (B, S, D)

dastar khan special cloth spread on the ground for serving food; special invitation for food (P)

daudo renowned Hunza noodle soup made with *qurut* (q.v.) (B)

dawat special meal offered to selected guests

dildung platform for cooking in Wakhi house

drepch broom made from sorghum used at *kitithid* (q.v.) for cleaning the house

druksh ox

dumba fat-tailed sheep, a highly-valued animal for slaughtering on festive occasions (K)

darbar regular festive gathering at the seat of the colonial representative (U)

Eid Islamic festival (U)

ek-fasli description of field or region where only one crop can mature (P, U)

fateha condolence prayers (A, U)

fetek lamentations

firman message, order of a higher authority (P)

gabi transverse flute (B, Kh)

gewora wooden cradle in which new-born babies are protected from draughts

gushpur member of local gentry in the Karakoram (B)

gushti meat slaughtered in early winter to be hung in the storeroom, meat supply for the cold season

hub ror chapik meal eaten on the seventh day of mourning

jagir fief (P)

jalsa gathering of local chiefs during colonial times (P)

jamaat khana community centre, prayer house (P)

keryar communal work in support of neighbours and relatives

khalifa lay priest (B, U)

khan fortified village (B)

kheel wooden wedge

khudoi religious offering

kitithid spring festival in Ghujal

kuch migration of flocks and shepherds between village and pasture settlements

kuchkhemak khudoi return of the flock from the high pastures connected with a celebration and an offering

kutor clan, kinship group

lambardar representative of kinship group, headman (P, U)

mara storeroom of the traditional Wakhi house

maska freshly-churned butter (P)

mehman khana guest house (P)

mehtar local title for Chitral hereditary ruler(Kh)

merik cream of milk

mir title of hereditary ruler (P)

muhallah hamlet, residential quarter in a settlement (A, U)

mukhi lay priest (G)

musafir traveller (P)

namda felt mat to cover the sitting and sleeping platforms in a local house (P)

nusdun weeding in fields for cleaning the crops

pai home-prepared yoghurt

pamir flat and extended high pastures of Central Asia offering excellent grazing (K)

pattu local cloth made from sheep wool

petek traditional head gown, veil

pir religious leader (U)

pish pish winik wood similar to that of the willow tree

ptuk sprinkling flour on pillars, walls, and doors during various ceremonies

pushoori a quantity of butter (15-30 kg) wrapped in birch bark

qamishdon iron saucepan for the preparation of bread in charcoal fires (K)

qhamali thin crisp pancake (B)

qista fermented flat bread (B)
qurut dehydrated buttermilk, stored for the winter and used as a special ingredient for soups and gruels (P)
raja local ruler (P)
raz platform for sleeping and resting in the traditional house
ricn opening in the flat roof of the Wakhi house above the fireplace, letting light in and smoke out
rugun butter, ghee
salgirah festive day in memory of a particular occasion, community holiday with performances and celebrations (U)
sangar protective wall, hunter's hiding place while poaching for ducks (P)
sar chupen gleaning
semen chapik sweet dish made of fermented grain
shabaran polo ground (B, S)
shalwar kameez trouser and shirt, national dress of Pakistan (U)
sherma rug made of goat and/or yak hair (B)
shirin xui sweet sister (affectionate address)
skeeth traditional women's hat
sogho butter-churn
spandr aromatic herbs for ritual ceremonies (P)
stors miniature plough
surnay double-reeded oboe (P); accompanied by two drums in local Dom bands
taghum sowing festival during the first week in March
taweez talisman (U)
tehsil administrative unit in Pakistan (U)
tham hereditary ruler in Hunza (B)
thigh buttermilk
thumushalin the annual festival of slaughtering animals in Hunza. The meat is kept in the store as winter supply (B)
trak cupboard in the traditional house
tranpha the local representative of the *tham* (q.v.) in a Hunza village (B)
tui wedding ceremony traditionally celebrated in autumn

tutek recorder, one of the instruments played by Dom musicians (B, S)
wali holy man, itinerant preacher (P, U)
wazir prime minister in Hunza, representative of the Dogra rulers in Gilgit (A, P, U)
werchik Wakhi classification for Burusho
wilina platform on wooden posts for drying *qurut* (q.v.) (K)
women's tanzeem women's organization in the villages of the Northern Areas of Pakistan (U)
woth xak the construction of channels, a festive day at the end of February connected with the cleaning and repairing of irrigation channels *(woth)*
wungastoy marriage of birds (ceremony)
wush druak gathering of grass
xatna circumcision ceremony (U)
xikwar Wakhi language
xun traditional Wakhi house
yeh baf good bye, cheerio
yirk barley *(Hordeum vulgare)*
yirke theng the ears of ripe barley
zama big pot utilized during village ceremonies
zamindar farmer, cultivator (U)
zarz milk
zax thornbush (seabuckthorn; *Hippophae rhamnoides)*
ziarat burial place, shrine (P)

FURTHER READINGS

There are no comprehensive works on the Wakhi of the Karakoram. Information has to be gathered from different sources in bits and pieces. Publications from the Wakhi Tajik Cultural Association are still awaited. In many local accounts on the geography and ethnography of Northern Pakistan, the Wakhi are not mentioned. Travelogues, intelligence reports, and memoirs, predominantly written during colonial times, cover the area and the people of this study in some depth. The Anglo-Russian rivalry over territorial dominance during the 'Great Game' brought this region into focus and enhanced our knowledge of its inhabitants. A number of these publications from the turn of the century present a wealth of information in a historical perspective. They contain valuable descriptions of the geography, ethnography, building methods, agriculture, trade, and communications. The internal social structure and external relations of the societies living on the roof of the world and in neighbouring countries have changed over the years and are being transformed again in modern times. Future developments might be compared with historical and contemporary events.

This selection of further readings includes a number of recently reprinted books which are readily available to the interested reader. Articles on recent research work published in scientific journals have been added for the sake of presenting a comprehensive bibliography of Wakhi studies.

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